

PROVINCETOWN ARTS

us \$15 canada \$14
volume 31
annual issue 2016/17

FEATURING



MARIE HOWE



TABITHA VEVERS





THE
SCHOOLHOUSEGALLERY



EILEEN MYLES

DIARY

INSTAGRAM PHOTOS
AUGUST 5 THROUGH 26, 2016

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(508) 214 0281

PROVINCETOWN

MAY 27 - JULY 6

Esteban Cabeza de Baca

JUNE 24 - JULY 6

Kenneth Dunne

JULY 8 - AUGUST 3

Ena Swansea

JULY 15 - AUGUST 3

Christian DeFonte

AUGUST 5 - AUGUST 24

Nathalie Ferrier

Peter Hutchinson

Peter Zimmermann

AUGUST 26 - SEPTEMBER 14

Get Together - Group Exhibition

SEPTEMBER 16 - OCTOBER 28

Carousel - Group Exhibition

WELLFLEET

MAY 28 - JUNE 29

Summertime - Group Exhibition

JULY 2 - AUGUST 3

Gary Kuehn

JULY 30 - AUGUST 31

Erika Wastrom

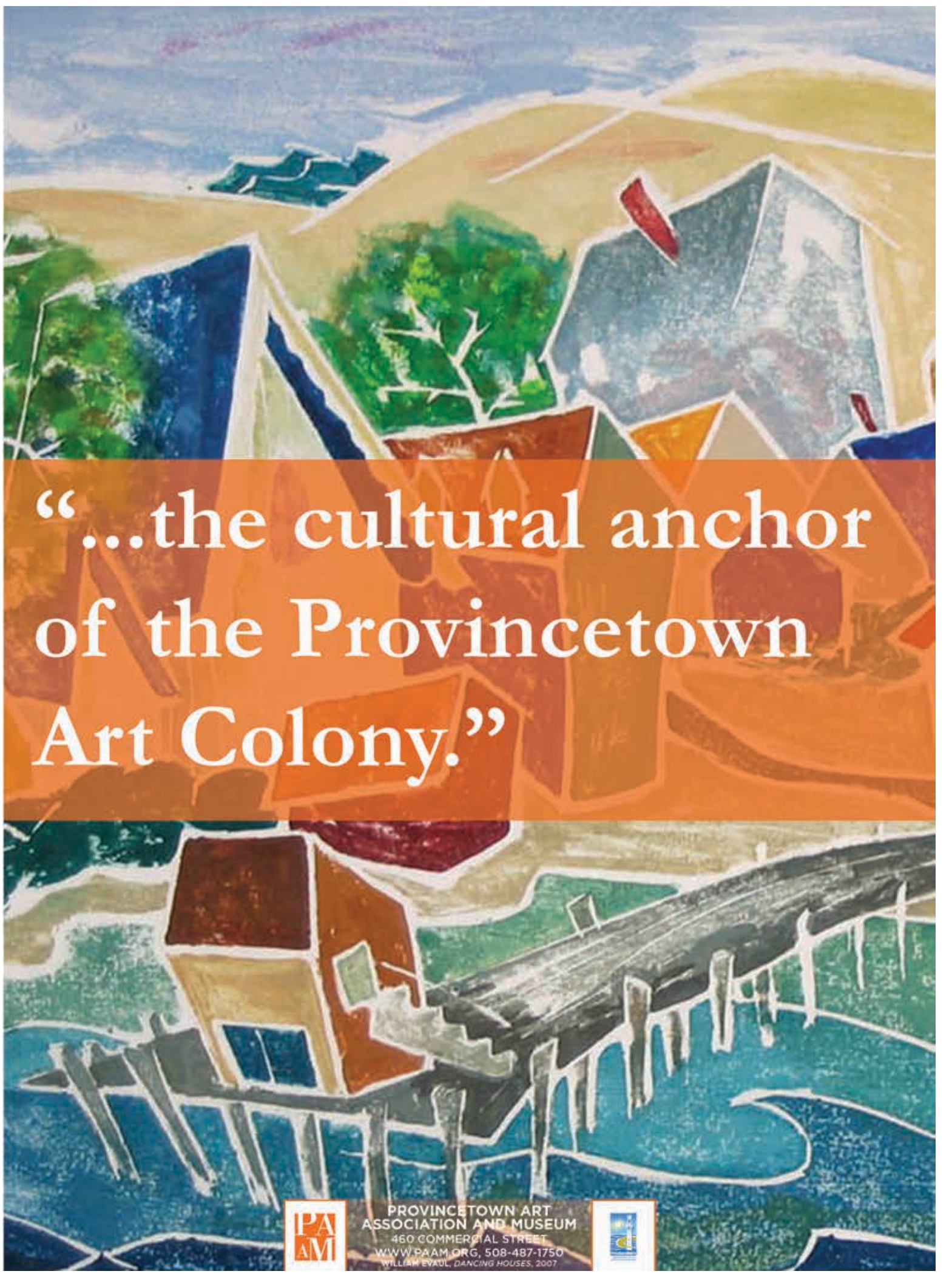
AUGUST 6 - AUGUST 31

Gail Marks

SEPTEMBER 3 - OCTOBER 10

I'll Be Your Mirror - Group Exhibition

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An abstract painting by William Evaul titled 'Dancing Houses, 2007'. The painting features a collage of geometric shapes and vibrant colors, including yellows, oranges, reds, blues, and greens. It depicts a stylized landscape with houses, trees, and a body of water. The composition is layered, with some elements appearing to float or dance above others. A semi-transparent orange band across the middle contains white text.

“...the cultural anchor
of the Provincetown
Art Colony.”



PROVINCETOWN ART
ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM
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WWW.PAAM.ORG, 508-487-1750
WILLIAM EVAUL, DANCING HOUSES, 2007



ETHAN COHEN

ISAAC ADEN

I LIKE AMERICA

MAY 5 - JUNE 20

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SUMMER SALON

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OLIVER CHAFFEE
NANNO DE GROOT
EDWIN DICKINSON
DOROTHY EISNER
GIL FRANKLIN
WILLIAM FREED
MAURICE FREEDMAN
JIM GAHAGAN
MARY HACKETT
JACK HALL
MYRNA HARRISON
HANS HOFMANN
LESTER JOHNSON
WOLF KAHN
KARL KNATHS
SHARLI POWERS LAND
BLANCHE LAZZELL
CHARLES LITTLER
GEORGE LLOYD
PHILIP MALICOAT
HERMAN MARIL
GEORGE McNEIL
JAY MILDER
ROSS MOFFETT
ROBERT MOTHERWELL
JAN MULLER
SEONG MOY
LILLIAN ORLOWSKY
HAYNES OWNBY
JACK TWORKOV
ILYA SCHOR
RESIA SCHOR
MAURICE STERNE
MYRON STOUT
KENNETH STUBBS
TONY VEVERS
E. AMBROSE WEBSTER
AGNES WEINRICH



Jack Tworlov, *Still Life with Limes*, circa 1948, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches

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SALLY'S PARTY

July 19 - September 13, 2016
gala opening: July 19th, 5-8p



James Lechay "Bouquet #5, Still Life Blue and Gray" oil 6" X 19"

Featured Artists

Berenice Abbott
Eugene Atget
Jasper Johns
Robert Motherwell
James Lechay
Rebecca Welz
Pasquale Natale

surprise guests TBA

painting
sculpture
prints
vintage photography

curators: "Sally Nerber-in-Spirit and Brenda Correia

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Daily 10 - 5



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MAURICE FREEDMAN (1904–1985), *Bay Studio*, 1959, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches
Part of a large collection of art by Maurice Freedman on view at Julie Heller Gallery and Julie Heller East



Hawthorne School portrait in a Newcomb-Macklin gold leaf frame, *Untitled, Provincetown Fisherman*, c.1925, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches



WILLIAM ZORACH (1887–1966), *Provincetown Sailing*, c.1916, color linoleum block print, 10.5 x 8.5 inches

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Still Life with Starfish and Violets, oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches

Lillia Frantin

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The artist's full-color book **STUDIO, GARDENS AND THE SEA** is available through the galleries

FINE ARTS WORK CENTER in Provincetown

EXHIBITIONS

JUNE 10 - JULY 4

The Last artSTRANDING: From the Beginning

JULY 9-24

The Visual Arts Faculty of the Summer Program
Private Opening

JULY 29 - AUGUST 22

Varujan Boghosian, Ninety! Visual Poet
Literature in Art, Constructions, and Collage

AUGUST 12-20

40th Annual Auction Preview
Featured Artist - Varujan Boghosian

SEPTEMBER 2-5

The Art of Memory
Alzheimer's Support Group of Cape Cod

SEPTEMBER 8-25

Beachcombers

EVENTS

SUMMER AWARDS CELEBRATION JULY 9
JAMES LECESNE & EILEEN MYLES

CELEBRATION OF POETIC VOICES AUGUST 7-12
RICHARD BLANCO, PATTY LARKIN & ROBERT PINSKY

40TH ANNUAL ART AUCTION AUGUST 20
VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN, FEATURED

FAWC.ORG

24 Pearl Street | Provincetown, MA 02657 | 508.487.9960

VICKY TOMAYKO, *July Aquarium (detail)*, 2015, monoprint with lithography, 11" x 13.5"

Visual Arts Fellow 1985-1986 and 2016 Summer Workshop faculty member

The Fine Arts Work Center is an equal opportunity provider and employer. The Work Center facilities are accessible to people with disabilities.

PROGRAMS

SUMMER WORKSHOPS

JUNE 12-AUGUST 26

90 week-long workshops
in creative writing and visual arts
Nightly readings, artist talks, and
open studios (Monday-Thursday)

24PEARLSTREET

Year-round online writing program

FELLOWSHIP

Seven-month residences for
emerging artists and writers

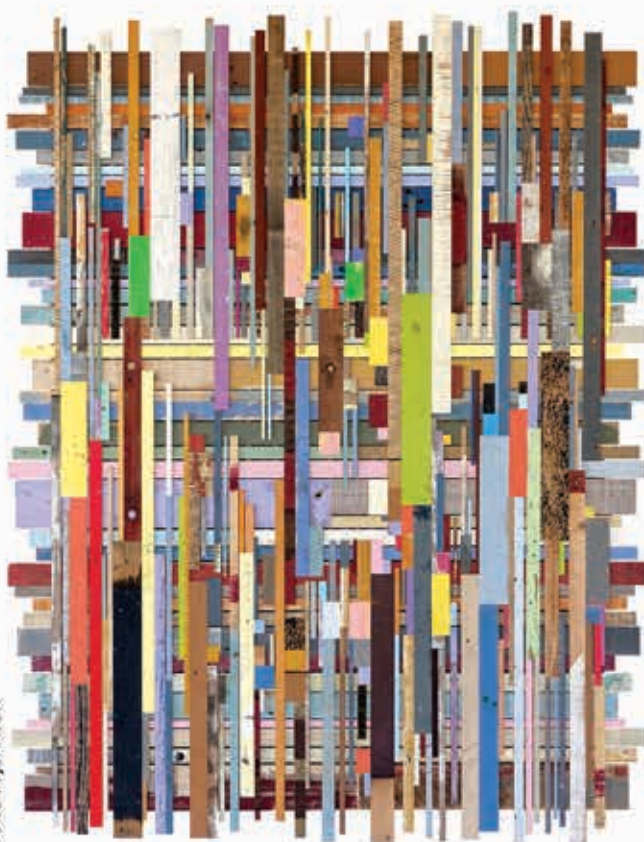


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ANNE SALAS



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MIKE WRIGHT



CATHERINE MCCARTHY



ROBERT MORGAN



LAURENCE YOUNG

May 27 – June 23:

"Meme"—Group Show with all Alden Gallery artists

June 24 – July 7:

Anne Salas, Linda Reedy, and Robert Glisson

July 8 – July 21:

Mike Wright, Paul Kelly

July 22 – August 4:

Laurence Young, Ed Christie

August 5 – August 18:

Joerg Dressler, Kevin Cyr

August 19 – September 1:

Robert Morgan, Sean McCabe

September 2 – September 15:

Catherine McCarthy,

Cathleen Daley

September 16 – January 3:

AUTUMN GROUP SHOW—

Ed Christie, Kevin Cyr,

Cathleen Daley, Alice Denison,

Joerg Dressler, Robert Glisson,

Raúl Gonzalez III, Paul Kelly,

Sean McCabe, Catherine McCarthy,

Robert Morgan, Paul Pedulla,

Linda Reedy, Anne Salas,

Heather Toland, Mike Wright,

and Laurence Young.



Irene Lipton

New Paintings

July 8 – 21, 2016

Albert Merola gallery

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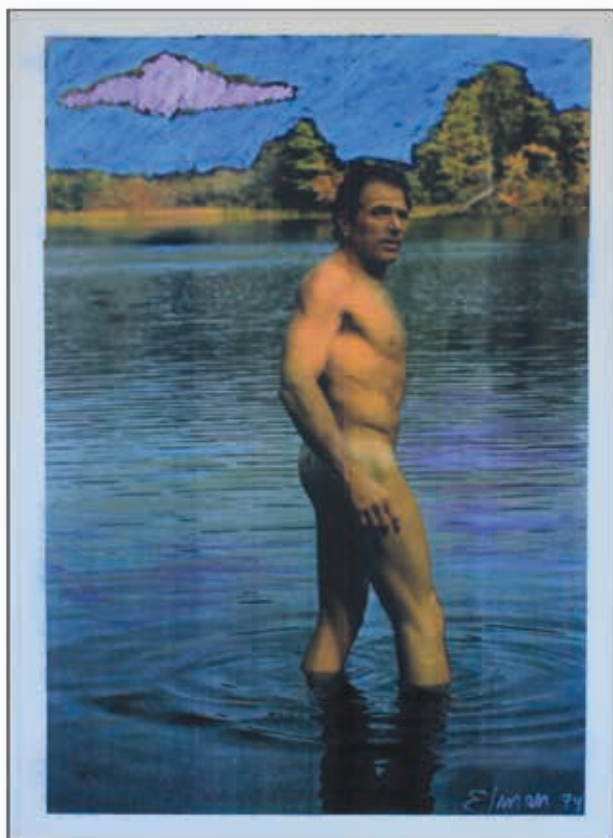


John Grillo's "Tango"
Opening Reception - Wellfleet
Saturday, July 2nd 6 - 8 PM

15 Commercial Street, Wellfleet MA 508-349-2530 covegallery.com



Tango Exhibit
At Café Heaven
199 Commercial Street
Provincetown MA

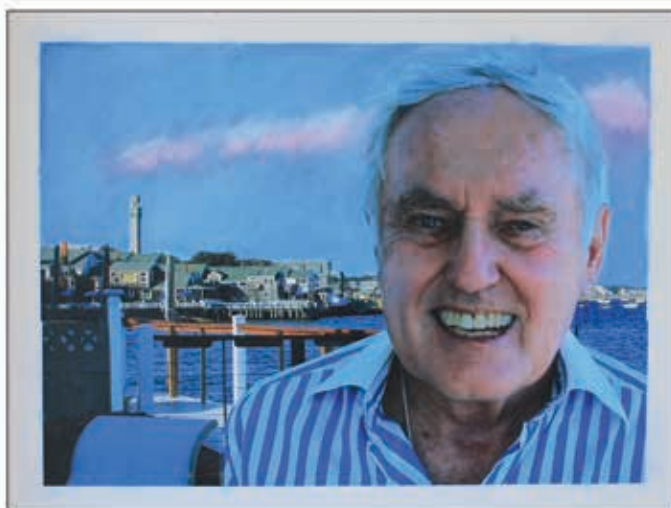


Cold Swim, 1994
43 x 60 inches . oil & digital collage on canvas

ELMAN RETROSPECTIVE AT PAAM . JUNE 17th to AUGUST 7th

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- Linda Leslie Brown
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- Karen Cappotto
- Jamie Casertano
- Barbara Cohen
- Larry Collins
- Anne Corrsin
- Katrina del Mar
- Richard Dorff
- Dana Ellyn
- Mimi Gross
- Megan Hinton
- Heather Kapplow
- Zehra Khan
- Keith Krisa
- Michael Landis
- Shania LeClaire Riviere
- David Macke
- Nancy Marks
- Bobby Miller
- James Montford
- Jeannie Motherwell
- Judith Motzkin
- Frank Mullaney
- Eileen Myles
- Pasquale Natale
- Alice O'Malley
- Marian Roth
- Jicky Schnee
- Arlene Schulman
- Matt Sesow
- Christopher Sousa
- Christopher Tanner
- Gail Thacker
- Christopher Turner
- Champa Vaid
- Conrad Ventur
- Forrest Williams

July 1 - Aug 21, 2016
Exhibition at PAAM

CONTEXT AND CONTINUITY
The Art of William Evaul and the White-Line Print Tradition
Curated by Ron Shuebrook

Detail from study for "Dancing Driggers (Blessing of the Fleet)" 2005 - 36" x 22", charcoal and oil paint on paper.

Bill Evaul Studios & Gallery
347 Commercial Street | Provincetown
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2016

June 10 - 23: **Pat de Groot**
June 24 - July 7: **Donna Flax / Timothy Woodman**
July 8 - 21: **Irene Lipton / Tabitha Vevers**
July 22 - August 11: **Catastrophe** curated by **John Waters**
July 29 - August 11: **Richard Baker**
August 12 - 25: **Richard Tinkler / Paul Bowen**
August 26 - September 15: **Group Exhibition**

James Balla, Daniel Bodner, Fritz Bultman, Ann Chernow
Lyle Ashton Harris, Sharon Horvath, Elisabeth Kley
Michael Mazur, Jack Pierson, Mischa Richter, Duane Slick
Helen Miranda Wilson, William Wood, Frank Yamrus
Cary S. Leibowitz/Candyass - Fine Prints - Picasso Ceramics

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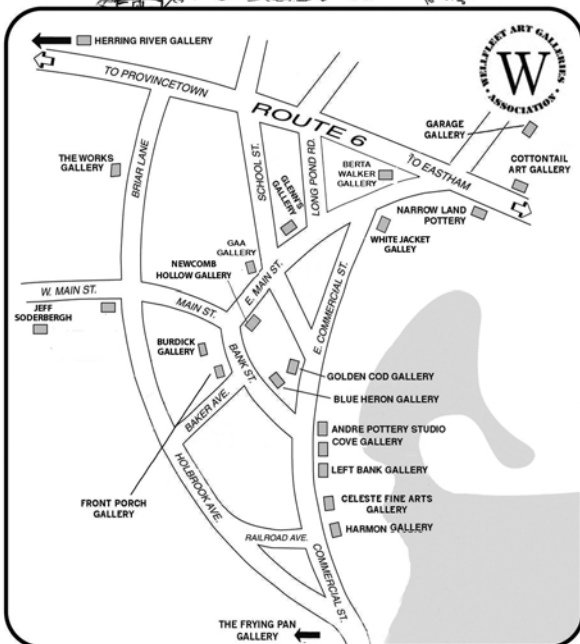
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Heather Bruce

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Julie Heller East

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Jane Eccles, First Flight, Oil on Canvas, 48"x48"

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- JULY 3 Summer Garden Party at Edgewood Farm
- JULY 14 Artists' Panel Discussion at Wellfleet Pres. Hall
- JULY 16 Pamet Float & Family Cookout
- JULY 18 Mark Bittman Dinner: Get Roasted & Smoked
- JULY 23 Castle Hill Summer Bash
- AUG 6 Castle Hill Art Silent Auction
- AUG 16 John Bunker Lecture Series w/ Sandor Katz
- AUG 26 Bread & Puppet Theater Performance
- AUG 27 Castle Hill Gala at Edgewood Farm
- SEPT 8 Paint the Race at the Schooner Regatta



www.castlehill.org

10 Meetinghouse Rd, Truro, MA 02666 info@castlehill.org



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Registrar: 617-717-9568

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MATTHEW CAPALDO

the glass house, oil on canvas, 8" x 10", 2016

four eleven gallery

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MICHAEL PRODANOU

Drawings

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 **Provincetown Arts Press**



Provincetown Dogs

BY SUSAN BAKER

See form on page 168 to order.

Ray Wiggs Gallery



Ray Wiggs, oil on canvas 30" x 40", 2016

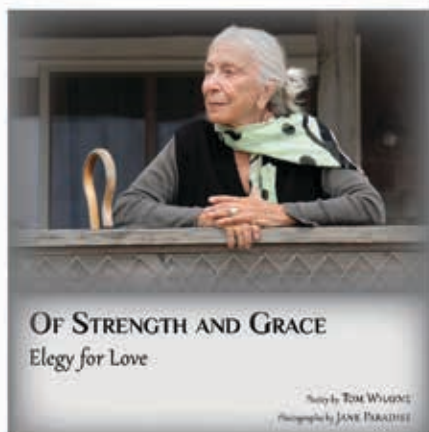
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OF STRENGTH AND GRACE Elegy for Love

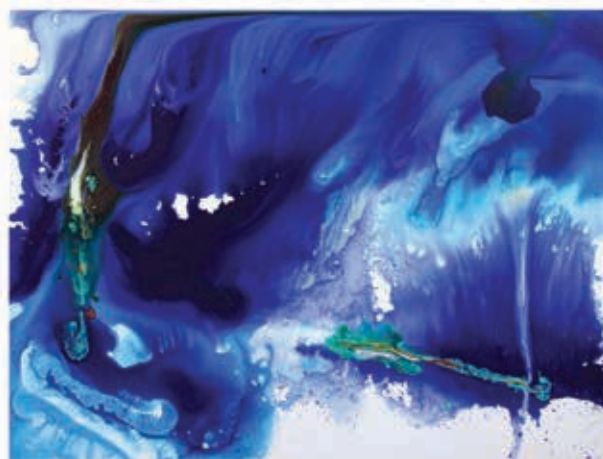
Story by TONY WILSON
Photography by JANE PARADISE

Proceeds from the sale of the book
will be donated to PAAM —
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Jane Paradise PHOTOGRAPHY

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Mariana, Acrylic on Claybord, 36" x 48"

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MAY 28 & 29



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JUNE 3 - SEPT 3



VARLA JEAN MERMAN
A LITTLE WHITE MUSIC
JUNE 22 - SEPT 3



WELL-STRUNG
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JUNE 29 - SEPT 10



TORI SCOTT
W/ JESSE KISSEL AT THE PIANO
JULY 5



STEVE GRAND
AN ALL AMERICAN BOY
JULY 6 - 8



JINKX MONSOON
W/ MAJOR SCALES AT PIANO
JULY 9 - SEPT 17



COURTNEY ACT
THE GIRL FROM OZ
JULY 12 - AUG 25



MEGAN HILTY
W/ SETH RUDETSKY AT THE PIANO
JULY 17 - 19



JUDY KUHN
W/ SETH RUDETSKY AT THE PIANO
JULY 29 & 30



JUDY GOLD
JULY 14 - SEPT 3



MARILYN MAYE
W/ BILLY STITCH AT THE PIANO
AUG 3 - 6

TOWN HALL: SUMMER 2016



INDIGO GIRLS
SUNDAY MAY 29



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THURSDAY JUNE 30



CHEYENNE JACKSON
WITH WILLY BEAMAN AT PIANO
SUNDAY JULY 3



VANESSA WILLIAMS
WITH SETH RUDETSKY AS PIANIST/HOST
MONDAY JULY 11



BIANCA DEL RIO
NOT TODAY SATAN
MONDAY AUG 15



KRISTIN CHENOWETH
AN EVENING WITH KRISTIN CHENOWETH
WITH MARY-MITCHELL CAMPBELL AT PIANO
TUESDAY AUG 16



AUDRA MCDONALD
WITH WILL SWENSON
AND SETH RUDETSKY AS PIANIST/HOST
SUNDAY AUG 21



PATTI LUPONE
COULDA, WOULD, SHOULD
WITH JOSEPH THALKEN AT PIANO
SUNDAY SEPT 4

DESIGN: MELINDA ANELLO



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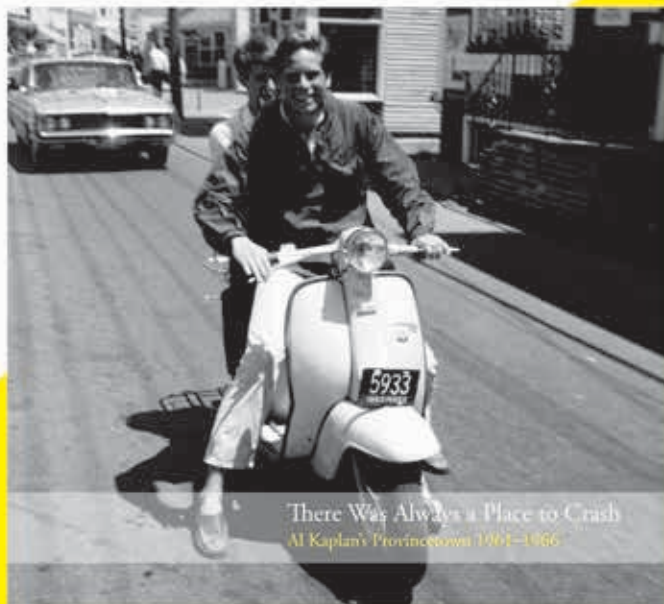
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There Was Always a Place to Crash: Al Kaplan's Provincetown 1961-1966

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— John Waters, author and filmmaker



There Was Always a Place to Crash
Al Kaplan's Provincetown 1961-1966



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Charles Hashim's Miami 1977-1983

We Are Everywhere And We Shall Be Free: Charles Hashim's Miami 1977-1983

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2003	BEST AMERICAN POETRY
2003	PUSHCART PRIZE XXIX: BEST OF THE SMALL PRESSES
2002	DISTINGUISHED SHORT STORIES OF 2001
1998	BEST AMERICAN MOVIE WRITING
1996	AMERICAN LITERARY MAGAZINE AWARDS: SPECIAL MENTION FOR DESIGN IN 1995
1995	PUSHCART PRIZE XX: BEST OF THE SMALL PRESSES
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1994	NOTABLE ESSAYS OF 1993
1993	AMERICAN LITERARY MAGAZINE AWARDS: FIRST PLACE FOR EDITORIAL CONTENT
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PROVINCETOWN ARTS 2016

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Marie Howe, *photograph by Grace Inan Howe*

Tabitha Vevers, *photograph by Irene Lipton*

Tabitha Vevers, *Shiva: Vortex (detail), 2016, oil and gold leaf on Mylar, 14.5 by 11.5 inches*

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Rhoda Rossmoore, Howard Weiner, Griswold ("Gooz") Draz, Ray Nolin*

PROVINCETOWN ARTS

A publication of Provincetown Arts Press, Inc.,
a nonprofit press for artists and poets

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Published annually in midsummer since 1985, *Provincetown Arts* focuses broadly on artists, performers, and writers who inhabit or visit the tip of Cape Cod, and seeks to stimulate creative activity and enhance public awareness of the cultural life of the nation's oldest continuous artists' colony. Drawing upon a century-long tradition rich in art, theater, and writing, *Provincetown Arts* publishes essays, fiction, interviews, journals, performance pieces, poetry, profiles, reporting, reviews, and visual features, with a view toward demonstrating that a community of artists, functioning outside the urban centers, is a utopian dream with an ongoing vitality.

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Most of *Provincetown Arts* is freelance written. Unsolicited manuscripts
are welcome and will be considered between September and December.
Enclose SASE for writers' guidelines. The best guide for content and
length is a study of past issues.

Member: Council of Literary Magazines and Presses

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Provincetown Arts
650 Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657
Tel: (508) 487-3167 • Fax: (508) 487-3559
E-mail: cbusa@comcast.net
www.provincetownarts.org

Subscriptions are \$15 per annual issue
Back issues available • Order form on page 168
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Provincetown Arts is indexed in the *Humanities International Complete*.

PRINTED IN USA

NATIONAL AND CANADA DISTRIBUTION:
Ingram Periodicals, Nashville, TN

ISSN: 1053-5012

Printed by RPI Printing in Fall River, MA.



PHOTO BY LYNNE HARROLD

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A strange thing happened as I was editing the magazine this year. I started to feel that I *really* wanted to meet the people I was reading about. Some of the artists and writers discussed passed away many years ago, some are still among us. But what struck me was the way they all seem to have fresh life in these pages, in the stories of their lives, even in the photographs, where some of the faces seem to be staring back at me a bit sadly, as if they wish they could be here too. Perhaps this uncanny feeling has something to do with the fact that my busiest time for work on the magazine is in the spring, when green starts to appear, slowly, right outside my office window, culminating in a crowning glory of huge

pink rhododendron blossoms, in full bloom even as I write. Everything is regenerating. Opening. Resurrected.

I think of regeneration when I see the work of our first featured artist, Tabitha Vevers. In her diverse series of work, she uses a variety of materials, including found objects, and techniques, such as scrimshaw, to create innovative art: images of a surreal Eden, provocative seascapes painted on shells and gilded with gold leaf, *Flying Dreams* paintings based upon Mexican devotional paintings that give thanks for a blessing or miracle. Vevers's five *Lover's Eyes* series, in which she reinvents artists' iconic visions of eyes throughout the ages, are especially impressive. These paintings bring to life an intriguing collection of people (and fictional characters who seem to live and breathe) in clever, tenderly rendered details—one eye, staring out at us, each image truly a mirror of the soul.

Marie Howe is our featured writer this year. She is a poet whose work reflects a deep understanding, and questioning, of a wide range of human emotion and experience, including the nature of parenthood, loss, and the terrors and grace of everyday life. Some of her most recent poetry features two women in history—Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene, Jesus's follower—transforming these iconic figures into frank, reasoning, modern women. These poems deftly combine the personal and the sacred—a powerful combination found throughout Howe's work. What I found especially poignant in this feature, as I was reading through the beautiful profiles written by friends and colleagues, was the profound sense of community in Marie's world, which is creative and personal and seems to extend far beyond her family of friends and poets and readers.

A vast and welcoming artistic community shines throughout our pages this year. I feel as if I'm in the same room with Dick Kiusalas, in his interview with Meg Pier, as he talks about his process creating unconventional furniture. Danielle and Elizabeth Mailer discuss their mother, Adele Mailer, in an interview that gives a new perspective on her art and life, and a new look as well at this prominent Provincetown family. The writer William Bless talks about going on pilgrimage to find a tangible trace of a long-dead poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, by uncovering the location of her actual vacation home in Truro during the 1920s. In "Remembering Eddie," Eddie Bonetti's personality seems to literally jump off the page in the personal profiles of his friends, and his writing talent does as well in "Viva," an essay Bonetti wrote about Provincetown in the '50s.

Paul Lisicky's new memoir is reviewed here, and in this extraordinary book he talks about his profound feelings following the death of his friend Denise: "I want to believe that she's impossible to know, as all of us are impossible to know. How else to keep her alive in me? I want Denise to keep growing taller, wider: a redwood with many rings."

Change, death, are inevitable, like the seasons, and yet I think our loved ones, our lost ones, do grow taller and wider. In our minds and memory, they never die—they grow up, mature, as we reinvent them through greater understanding and our own evolution. At the end of Dennis Minsky's article on Hilary Masters, Minsky suggests that Masters's body of work enlarges his readers' lives, and declares, "You are good company." This is not mere memorializing. These tributes are an exercise in friendship, celebrating an essence that cannot be destroyed, traces that are not erased by time or tide.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susanna". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Susanna Ralli
Senior Editor

ARTISTS

Susan Bee and **Johanna Drucker** have collaborated on a delightful book in praise of famous women, *Fabulas Feminae* (Litmus Press, 2015), reducing complex historical biographies via a modern computer technique for abstracting essential details from mountains of available information.



Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Mary Shelley, Annie Oakley, Rosa Parks, Billie Holiday, Virginia Woolf, and Susan Sontag are less than a third of the women featured, exuberantly displayed in Sue Bee's collaged images of aspects of their fabulous lives. Drucker utilized a hapax legomenon processing program, which "automatically condenses large quantities of text into an abstract." The result can be comically referential or metaphorically surprising, as in this excerpt on Virginia

Woolf: "Member Bloomsbury female counterpart invented at times sarcastically in some of her novels. To the Lighthouse. . . . Condition unable all the happiness of my life. Patient everything gone but the certainty drowned. All I could do was offer. Now regarded." Sue Bee's drawings of these subjects likewise condense their many parts into enduring fables, turning their lives into legends.

Four artists associated with the Lower Cape, **Carmen Cicero**, **Sam Messer**, **Joan Snyder**, and **Janice Redman**, were among thirty-seven artists invited to show in the 2016 Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts, sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The artists were chosen by members of the academy from a pool of nearly two hundred nominees. Through a prestigious purchase prize, four of Redman's sculptures will be donated to an American art museum.

Maura Coughlin and **Tobias Everett** were cocurators of PAAM's spring exhibition *To Promote Good Fellowship: A Centennial Exhibition of Early Works from the Beachcombers Club, 1916–1976*. Coughlin, with a PhD in nineteenth-century French painters, is ideally suited to offer compelling context for the originating impulses behind the formation of the Beachcombers, and their remarkable legacy. Indeed, it is a commonality that artists seek out enclaves where they can live in a town by a farm or in a fishing village. Thus, the French Impressionists fled Paris to the Normandy coast or the irradiated sunshine of the Côte d'Azur. On the French side of the English Channel, artists Richard Miller, George Senseney, and Max Bohm were attracted to one town in



Janice Redman, *Brood Chamber*, 2014



particular, Étaples, where they put on group exhibitions. Fleeing Europe at the start of the First World War, they found Provincetown to be a good facsimile of these isolated French towns with primitive charm. The array of responses by Provincetown artists to Impressionism, shown in the current exhibition, hung salon-style in the great gallery on four walls, sculpture mingling on the floor on pedestals, compresses a major chapter in Provincetown art history. Through a century of looking and learning for the fifty artists—as Cubism replaced Impressionism, Abstract Expressionism replaced Americana, and, in another decade, Pop and Conceptualism replaced Ab-Ex—the exhibition offers actual insight into how artists absorb, in the originality of their cultivated individuality, the temper of the times with such a chorus of unique tempers.

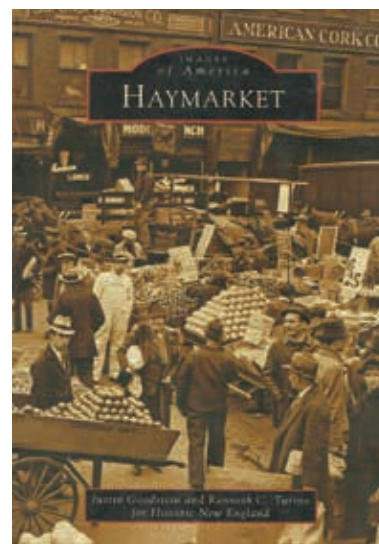
Jon Friedman has made a career from painting official portraits of notable members of Congress and others, including Mayor Michael Bloomberg on his last day in office. His latest success in capturing the likeness of a man of power is two portraits of Representative Henry Waxman, Democrat from California, an influential member of Congress, and the chair of two congressional committees that were instrumental in passing key

legislation on health care and the environment. In one of Friedman's paintings, Waxman sits in front of a wall dotted with holograph documents and photographs of various presidents leaning over the signing table. These frames also display a collection of pens that were used by every president since Jimmy Carter to sign legislation that Waxman played a crucial role in writing.

Justin Goodstein and **Kenneth Turino**, in their new book *Haymarket* (Arcadia Publishing) for Historic New England's Images of America series, have told in pictures the story of Boston food markets, beginning with early colonial markets and taking us to the opening of Faneuil Hall in 1742, Quincy Market in 1826, and the present-day Haymarket, which began as an expansion of Quincy Market. Now, with the completion of the Big Dig, like an excavation from the past, Haymarket has emerged again with its still-boisterous neighborhood crowded with carts filled with fruits and vegetables, halal butchers offering meats, and cheesemongers selling artisanal delicacies from around the world.



Jon Friedman, *Henry Waxman*
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Daniel Heyman and Lucy Ganje, *We Can Be Self-Sufficient*, 2015

Daniel Heyman's latest body of work—*In Our Own Words: Native Impressions*—presents twelve portraits of Native Americans living on reservations in North Dakota, who sat for Heyman during interviews in June 2015. Carving the likeness of his subjects into thick wood blocks, Heyman created a series of portraits of Native Americans who recount in their own words the moving stories of their lives, often including moments of deep emotion that together create a fresh portrait of contemporary Native life on the northern plains. In collaboration with letterpress artist Lucy Ganje and master printer Kim Fink, both professors at the University of North Dakota, Heyman listened to interviews conducted by Ganje as twelve tribal members described their lives and the struggles and dreams they have for their people. Previously working in collaboration with human-rights lawyers, Heyman produced several portfolios of printed portraits, including two portfolios of Iraqi former detainees and torture victims from Abu Ghraib prison, and a suite of painted portraits of US survivors of military sexual assault. With the poet Nick Flynn, Heyman created an artists' book of drypoint portraits and poems by Flynn based on interviews conducted in Istanbul of the former detainees from the Abu Ghraib prison. Lucy Ganje summed up what the new images strive for: "As artists we hoped to create images that communicated to nonnative people the depth and quality of character found in Native communities."

Al Kaplan's black-and-white images of Provincetown in the early 1960s are featured in *There Was Always a Place to Crash: Al Kaplan's Provincetown, 1961–1966* (www.letter16press.com). This is a photography book that proves what John Waters only remembers from the sixties, when the filmmaker first arrived here: "Yes, I lived in a tree fort in Provincetown in 1966 and inside is an actual photo of it. The benches, yes, those benches, were the nerve center of coolness in Provincetown and bohemian studs and bad ass girls were on every corner. My favorite picture in the book? Beatnik feet in dirty sandals. We all have our twisted memories, don't we?"

Ellen LeBow, an artist who shows with the Rice Polak Gallery in Provincetown, wrote monthly blogs for the gallery's newsletter, including one essay titled "The Dark Side of Light" (September 2015), which reflected on the topic of "tenebrism," a style of chiaroscuro painting using violent contrasts of light and dark. In a time before electricity, painters studied in depth the unique drama of heavy shadow illuminated by a single source of radiant light—a candle, fire, torches—with people clustered close by. Now, LeBow observes, our faces reflect the uncanny glow of our cellphones.



Jennifer Liese



Al Kaplan, *Mystery feet and unknown toes*, August 1962



Varujan Boghosian, *The Bride Vanishes* (detail), 2012

Jennifer Liese, Director of the Writing Center at the Rhode Island School of Design, and **Patricia Phillips**, Dean of Graduate Studies, moderated presentations last fall at RISD for "And Also: Artists & Designers Writing," a symposium that explored interconnections between art, design, and contemporary writing as part of a year-long graduate course they were coteaching to help artists and designers develop the skills they need to pursue dual practices and contribute to a broader cultural discourse through writing. Presenters included Brian Wallis, whose 1987 collection *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists* is considered by Liese to be the "bible of contemporary artists' writings." Other presenters included Amanda Reeser Lawrence, editor of the architectural journal *PRAXIS*, Marisa Mazria Katz, editor of *Creative Time Reports*, artist and critic John Miller, and new media artist, critic, and former *Rhizome* editor Marisa Olson. Liese is editing a new book, *Social Medium: Artists Writing, 2000–2015*, forthcoming from Paper Monument in the fall, which features work by seventy-five contemporary artist-writers.

John Scofield's recent book, *Robert Motherwell: In the Studio* (Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London), bubbles with the éclat of seasoned wisdom. The wraparound jacket photograph features Scofield watching as Motherwell puts a stroke on the enormous *Reconciliation Elegy*, spread out on the floor, a thirty-one-foot-long and ten-foot-high commission for the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington, DC. Scofield, an artist, craftsman, and landscape designer, was Robert Motherwell's studio assistant and confidant for three years in the late seventies, working daily with the artist in his array of studios in Greenwich, Connecticut. Motherwell, moving out of New York, purchased a section of a large estate, where he converted the top floors of the horse stables into living and dining quarters while the bottom floors were adapted to provide an industrial space for the production of art—studios for major paintings, collages, printmaking, and frame-making. Scofield worked in the Greenwich studios, then began coming to assist Motherwell in Provincetown, where he joined the Provincetown club the Beachcombers, loving the artistic "informality," in which the primitive and the elegant seemed to coexist.

John Yau, the poet and art writer who appeared on our cover last year, is also a founding editor of perhaps the most stimulating art blog in the country. (You can subscribe for free at hyperallergic.com.) Recently, Yau wrote a piece on Varujan Boghosian's exhibition at Kent Fine Art in New York, *Master of the Lost, Neglected, and Overlooked*. Perceptively, Yau argues that "Boghosian adds

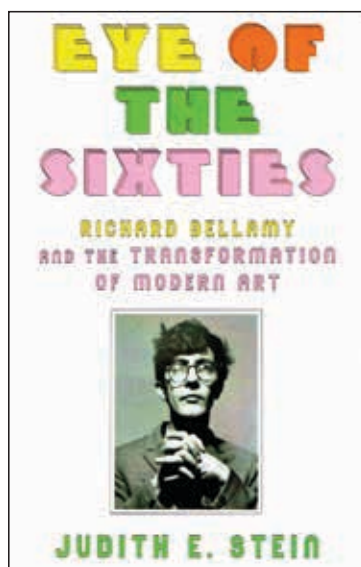
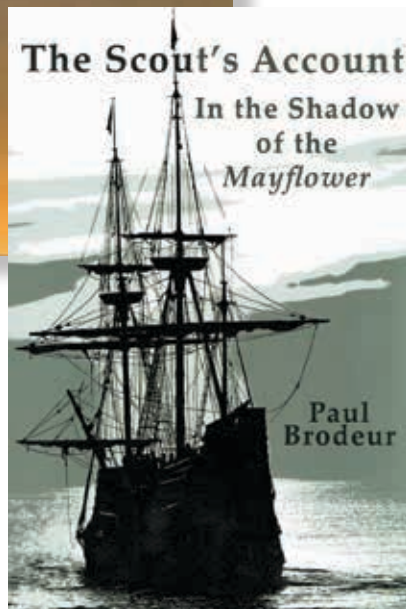
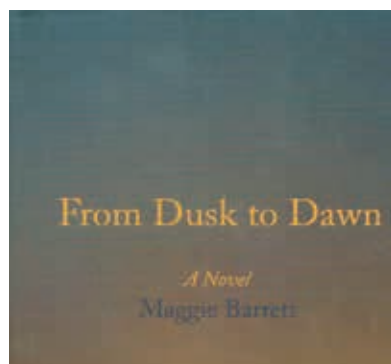
something new to collage: erasure. Working with found photographs and drawings in an additive process that also involves used and unused paper, he sands away part of the image in a found photograph or drawing. In the photographs, it is as if time has intervened, making a remote moment even more distant, like a lover whose face you cannot remember.” Boghosian is ninety this year, and his Provincetown dealer, Berta Walker, has scheduled memorial exhibitions this summer at her galleries and at the Fine Arts Work Center, where the artist is being celebrated as the honored guest.

WRITERS

Maggie Barrett, who spent many summers in Provincetown before summering in the Tuscan hills of Italy with her photographer husband Joel Meyerowitz, is the author of a new novel, *From Dusk to Dawn* (feelingourwayaround.com). In twelve hours, from sunset to sunrise, six characters, thrown together as strangers in an isolated inn on the edge of a cliff, confront intense challenges to personal beliefs. The compression of time, sandwiched between darkening twilight and brightening morning, reads with the revelations that are generally revealed in oracular dreams.

Robert Begiebing, author of a trilogy of historical novels featuring events in New England between 1648 and 1850, as well as *The Turner Erotica*, based on the life and work of the British painter J. M. W. Turner, turns his attention to the present time in *The Territory Around Us: Collected Literary and Political Journalism, 1982–2015* (Troy Books). His convincingly detailed evocations of the distant past, revealing the wisdom acquired from patient reflection, serve to put our present moment in grand perspective. Begiebing is eloquent on the bizarre politics of global warming, the uncanny poetics of contemporary poets, and the oeuvre of Norman Mailer, with his “cascade of percipient detail and surprising yet apt metaphor.”

The legendary art dealer **Richard Bellamy** is the subject of a new biography by Judith Stein, *Eye of the Sixties: Richard Bellamy and the Transformation of Modern Art* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Bellamy was an enigmatic, soft-spoken, poetry-reading, saintly presence who often slept in his several galleries, being too poor to afford an apartment. He always dressed in “costume,” sometimes elegantly, sometimes in thrift-shop inventions that were the delight of his bohemian friends. In the era of the Tenth Street cooperatives in the early fifties, he became director of the artist-run Hansa Gallery, collaborating with the denizens of the downtown art world. In the summer of 1957, when the Hansa shut down until the fall, “Dick,” as he was known to his friends, headed to Provincetown with his entourage. Stein writes that the behavior of the Hansa crowd “relaxed even further on the Cape. To the



Hansa member George Segal, Provincetown summers were like ‘a sunburst of ease and sexuality and pleasure.’ . . . Over the years, Dick worked an assortment of jobs on the Cape, from fishing scallops to waiting tables at *Ciro & Sal’s*, a popular artists’ hangout.” Thus seasoned, Bellamy returned to New York with a strange countercultural passion to promote the best art, finding it “bizarre to acquire art for its potential to appreciate.” Yet, at the Green Gallery, and later at the Oil & Steel Gallery, he made famous the artists he showed, including Ronald Bladen, John Chamberlain, Mark di Suvero, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Yayoi Kusama, Claes Oldenburg, Larry Poons, James Rosenquist, Lucas Samaras, Richard Stankiewicz, Myron Stout, and Tom Wesselmann.

Paul Brodeur’s new novel, *The Scout’s Account: In the Shadow of the Mayflower* (Piscataqua Press), the first chapter of which was published in *Provincetown Arts* in 2011, tells the story of the arrival of the Pilgrims in 1620 from the point of view of the Native Americans, who had no written language to leave their own record of what happened in the tumultuous years that followed, including the uprising known as King Philip’s War. Brodeur, interweaving history with fiction in describing the colonization, conquest, and ethnic cleansing of the Native People, honors their way of life and a legacy that will resonate strongly for those of us who live on Cape Cod, which they called “The Narrow Land.” In a foreword, Brodeur announces that “any resemblance to actual events and locales is intentional.”

Judge Michael Jones has written a new book, *Art Law: A Concise Guide for Artists, Curators, and Art Educators*, which distills crucial legal issues important to practitioners in the arts. I wish my father, the artist Peter Busa, had had Judge Jones’s book handy when the IRS audited him, many times, questioning whether his career as a recognized professional artist might rather be considered a “hobby,” since he often made more money as a university professor teaching painting and drawing than he did from the sales of paintings. Luckily, this book exists to spare artists from the contortions imposed on them by the legal system. Jones navigates concerns that apply not only to artists, but to collectors and curators mindful of authenticity, museum curators cautious of thefts and forgery, and art writers wary of copyright and reproduction constraints. Eloquently, Jones argues for the moral rights of artists that transcend the freedom of expression guaranteed by the First Amendment. Jones is a champion triathlete in addition to having won numerous championships in the sport of aquathlon. The USA Triathlon poster for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio is based on a watercolor by Jones. Jones recently retired from the bench after serving more than twenty years as a trial court judge.

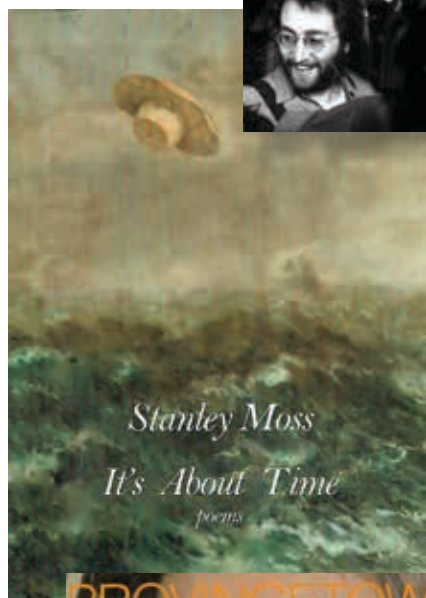
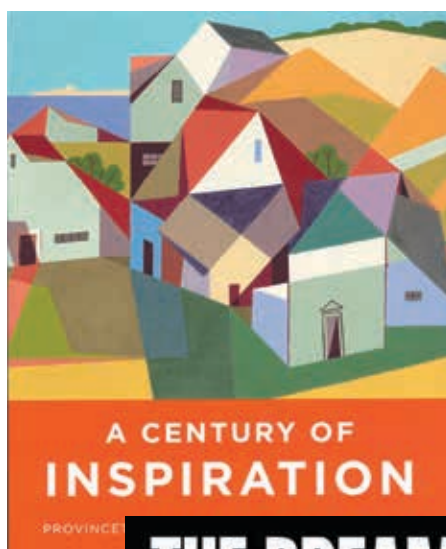
Anne-Marie Levine, poet, pianist, and visual artist, has produced a most unusual autobiography, *Reculer Pour Mieux Sauter* (Project Projects). Levine was born in Belgium, her family’s home after they fled the Nazi invasion, and her book’s title is from the French, meaning “fall back

to jump higher.” Indeed, she relays information that precedes her birth, discussing the death of her father’s brother on the *Titanic* in 1912, conveying these facts via collaged documents pasted side by side with quotations from her previously published books of poetry (*Euphoria* was published by Provincetown Arts Press in 1994). Levine tells her own story through this collection of memories, pasting “in fits and starts” the voices of others, such as Fredric Jameson: “An autobiographical scrapbook in which various real-life experiences . . . are reformulated and reassembled in a more satisfying memorial than any photo album.” Her self-effacing goal is to “arrange the pieces in such a way that the story will emerge without being told.”

Robin Lippincott, a novelist, has written a stellar meditation on the vibrant life and color-streaked abstractions of artist Joan Mitchell, *Blue Territory: A Meditation on the Life and Art of Joan Mitchell* (Tidal Press). Lippincott weaves together stories of Mitchell’s early girlhood, including a description of her forming patterns on the ice while skating: “She is alone and skating on ice. She listens as the silver blades slice and scratch the surface, watching crystalline shavings scatter and glisten in the furtive winter sunlight, leaving a trail of white flakes in her wake. . . . [T]his feeling, these movements, and the messages she cuts with her blades, [have] a choreography of her own—all of which are not unlike what she experiences when she paints, brushing a broad, continuous swath across a canvas that is much higher and wider than she is tall.” Lippincott’s intimate portrait of the artist gives voice to the power of her images.

Stanley Moss’s new volume of poetry, *It’s About Time* (Hopewell Press), culminates a distinguished career of many facets. His poetry has been praised by Stanley Kunitz as that of “a citizen of the world, both past and present, one who seems to have been everywhere and missed nothing.” Moss is the author of nine volumes of verse and the founding editor of the venerable Sheep Meadow Press, which has published poems and translations of notable poets of our time, in the United States and abroad. He is also a private art dealer specializing in Spanish and Italian old masters. His latest volume features a painting on the cover, *Salvaggio Miracoloso* by Girolamo Forabosco, depicting a hat tossed into a turbulent sea, which is referred to in Moss’s “The Poem of Self”: “So I throw a poem for a lark, like my hat, / off the Brooklyn Bridge, where Hart Crane, bless him, / ‘dumped the ashes of his dad in a condom.’ . . . I hope my drowned hat / shelters blind, half-dead newborns.”

Eileen Myles, featured on our cover at the turn of the last millennium, when she was known as a downtown voice of the New York poetry and art scene, has suddenly sprung into a new character as a darling of the mainstream, appearing in long profiles in highbrow publications such as the *New York Review of Books*, which recently touted the reissue of her 1994 autobiographical novel *Chelsea Girls* and *I Must Be Living Twice: New and*



Selected Poems, 1975–2014. These reprise and extend the author’s original use of the first person to create an invented alter ego with such an uncanny resemblance to her constructed self that, as Myles says, “I must be living twice.” Born in Boston, seasoned in New York and on the West Coast, Myles spends much of the summer at her house in Provincetown, where she frequently reads at AMP gallery and the Schoolhouse Gallery. Hers is a fiction of being alive, in which, she says, with “every step you’re making up who you are.”

Harvard art historian **Melissa Renn** wrote an incisive essay, “Via Provincetown: The American Avant-Garde on Cape Cod, 1913–1966,” that was published in the centennial monograph *A Century of Inspiration: Provincetown Art Association and Museum* (2015). Renn’s essay spoke from the perspective of a modern scholar freshly encountering a body of selected material for reconsideration, and she developed a concept for the continual propulsion of the artists’ colony, “Provincetown’s Usable Past.” Quoting the critic Van Wyck Brooks—“Discover, invent a usable past. . . . The past is an inexhaustible storehouse”—Renn demonstrates how the various historical styles that clashed in our immediate view were also reflected in the cultural wars raging across the nation. The locus of Provincetown is the setting for a

chapter in American cultural history, played out in succeeding decades.

Dan Richter’s second memoir, *The Dream Is Over: London in the 60s, Heroin, and John & Yoko* (Quartet Books), follows his account of playing a great ape in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for which he spent hours studying apes in the London Zoo and the chimpanzees in Jane Goodall’s films. Trained in mime and acting, Richter went on to work and live with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, shooting photographs of their album covers and helping to produce the iconic 1972 *Imagine* video and their other films and albums. Richter’s intimate memoir is an insider’s look at the sixties and its celebrities, including poets Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, musicians Eric Clapton and Bob Dylan, artists such as Andy Warhol, and the story of the breakup of the Beatles.

Chef Rossi has written the *Alice B. Toklas Cookbook* of our time, *The Raging Skillet* (Feminist Press), using food to gather eccentrics around a common table resplendent with pithy anecdotes about why life is worth living. From downtown kitchens in New York, to the galleys of riverboats, to her time in Provincetown—where she was mentored by Molly O’Neill, herself a disciple of Julia Child—Chef Rossi learned to cook for crowds ranging from the famous to the rescue workers at ground zero in the aftermath of 9/11. Rossi is an impatient foodie who despises complicated recipes, and the book’s glossary shuns a measuring cup, instead using improvisational shakes, shimmies, and spot-on



TabithaVevers

BEAUTY AND DANGER A DUÆLITY OF VISION

BY ANDRÉ VAN DER WENDE

I FIRST MET TABITHA VEVERS at her Wellfleet studio in July of 2004. I was writing about the *Shell* series, her summer show at the DNA Gallery in Provincetown, Nick Lawrence’s bastion of contemporary art. She was charming, friendly, and personable, giving considered thoughtful responses to probably inane questions. I talked about that “through the looking glass” quality in her work, and she mentioned embracing a “quirky expressiveness” when it came to painting the figure: “I don’t work from life that much, so whatever’s weird about the anatomy is my own doing.”

Whatever was weird about it was also a big part of what was great about it, giving her work a binding stamp that’s unique to Vevers’s hand. Her paintings were strange and wonderful, nervously unsettling, and funny. Painted on clamshells, their small and intimate size only intensified the shifting quality of the gold leaf, with saturated color, opulent detail, and riveting narratives full of lobsters and surreal human figures with unnerving stares and tails and rubbery limbs attached to sallow bony frames. She is that most mysterious of artists, one who transcends the role of painter—though she is, of course, a first-rate one, her unhurried layering of tiny brushstrokes giving the work a nuanced pulse and a presence that is completely original.

Vevers is a conjurer of images first, a trader of dreams who takes apart art history and reapplies it with a modern narrative that comes from her own experience as a contemporary woman. Taking on vital topics—such as matters of gender, feminism, the AIDS crisis, the environment, religion, and politics—Vevers creates a looping serial narrative of the most intimate and rarified kind, with unflinching barbs and a quirky, at times uncomfortable, deadpan humor laid out in her devotional, seductive approach to painting. These are deeply psychological works that exist within that middle ground: the ether between conscious thought and the unguarded warrens of the unconscious mind. It’s pat to say her work has a dreamlike quality, but this characterization does hold water to some extent, not just because of her *Flying Dreams* series, or the fact that the original doodle for *Amoebayouba*, the painting that began the *Eden* series, came to her in a dream. It’s more than that—there’s a deft gauzy quality even when her figures are running or flying, where time is not so much still as slow and indeterminate, a netherworld of changing perceptions and identities.

At the beginning of 2009, I talked to Vevers at length at her Cambridge studio while I was covering *Narrative Bodies*, her twenty-year mid-career retrospective at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, an exhibition of some sixty paintings and objects that traveled to the Provincetown Art Association and Museum later that summer. At that time, I talked about the “strong confrontational” nature of her latest paintings, the *Eden* series, which she said came from her love for “playing with the juxtaposition of something that’s really beautifully and delicately painted but can, on closer examination, be quite disturbing or challenging.”

The exhibition was a deep chronological overview of most of Vevers’s major series up to this point, starting in the late 1980s with *Secular Icons*, *Flesh Memories*, her work in scrimshaw (which includes the series

Tabitha Vevers in her Cambridge studio in 2014. On the wall are source images for *Lover’s Eyes*.



Tabitha with Tony and Elspeth Vevers, 1957, Law Street, Provincetown



Drawing by Tony Vevers of Lise Motherwell and Tabitha, 1967

A History of Cloning and *Women & Knives*), *Flying Dreams*, the *Shell* series, the *Eden* series, and *Lover's Eyes*. Vevers's penchant for working in series brings consistency to her work—there's nothing muddy about it or the arc that it has followed. By working serially, she makes it easy for writers and historians to keep track of her development and trajectory while giving clarity to the connections in between. And the connections are many—from the rebound of art history, to the marriage of subject matter and materials.

To look at that arc of her evolution was to witness the steady forward momentum of an artist who was continually questioning and broadening her connection to the world and her visual articulation of it. *Narrative Bodies* shone brightly, but for Vevers personally it was a difficult, vulnerable time, with this prestigious mid-career assessment taking place soon after the loss of her father, the venerable artist Tony Vevers. "It's a very intense thing to do, this mining of your past, really going back and looking at all that earlier work," she says of the deCordova show. "It's an emotional experience. My dad had just died in the midst of preparing for the show. It was a really hard time—the death of a parent changes your relationship to the world."

Late last year, seven years after we had last sat down together, I was curious to know how Vevers's relationship to the world, as it pertained

to painting, had changed. We met in Wellfleet on a murky December day with a dirty gray fog lurking in the harbor as she was preparing to head back to the Cambridge loft she shares with her husband, artist Daniel Ranalli. For the summer and better part of the fall, Tabitha and Dan live here on an innocuous bend in the road that tracks the shoreline leading out to Great Island and Duck Harbor. The property is sandy and scruffy, Cape Cod natural without drawing attention to itself.

We visit her studio, which sits away from the house up a gentle rise. There's a newly replaced eight-by-six-foot bank of windows installed at the gable end, and a fresh coat of white interior paint—the final phase of a renovation funded by a recent Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant. Even on a dull day, the natural light is soft and even. She is still settling back in after the recent work on the studio but the space is already neat and clean. There's a selection of paintings on one wall in modest white box frames—some older pieces and some newer pieces, including one in which the figure kneeling in shallow water is adjusting to a recent revision in which Vevers removed what she decided was an extraneous leg. The surfaces feel delicate, refined, luxurious, and fixed, but they are also malleable—up to a point. "Because I paint translucently, there are things that are hard to change, which is why I try to map out the basic structure of the painting. But then, with-

in that—within the water, within a lobster or a figure—things can change and evolve. And then if I have to amputate a limb I can, but it's not easy!" she laughs. "I love the whole pentimento thing in other people's work, but it doesn't really work in mine."

Process is undoubtedly involved, but Vevers doesn't need to let us see visible traces of past revisions that show us how she got from A to B. To do so would detract from the potency and impact of the narrative, the final conviction of her figures in a credible space. If there's a consistency to her work, it's partly because everything feels worked through to its natural conclusion so that nothing leaves the studio before its time. You don't have to ask, you just know it to be true. The scale is small, her output modest. When she talks of recent work, that means any time within the last five years. There's no fat to Vevers's work. Everything is characteristically thought out, from the germ of an idea, to any research that goes along with it, well before any paint is applied or gold leaf is laid down. It's a layered process that reaches a stasis, with final framing and presentation treated as integral to affirming the potency of the image.

Vevers is coming off a strong exhibition titled *Lover's Eyes: Selfies*—which took place last fall at Lori Bookstein Fine Art in New York City, her second solo show for the gallery—and I ask



PHOTO BY DUDLEY PRATT

Tabitha rowing a dinghy built by her grandfather, 1962, North Haven, ME



Dory built by Tabitha in the early 1980s



Elsbeth, Tabitha, and Stephanie, 2013, Truro



Tabitha and Daniel, 2006, Provincetown dunes

her where she is now in her work. *Lover's Eyes* is her longest-running, most consistent series, stretching back to 2000, and interspersed between work on her figurative paintings. Vevers hesitates before responding, quietly gathering her thoughts: "I'm trying to get back to the figure, but perhaps in a simpler, more open space." On the wall, there's a painting of a small empty boat cast adrift from the shallow shoreline, no figures at all, implying presence without having to spell it out. For Vevers, that's a kind of abstraction in and of itself.

"I have this theory about my dad and his work, that when his father died in 1970, his work really changed, reflecting a dialogue that had also died. He didn't sign on to this theory," she confesses, "but his very last representational painting was titled *Requiem for My Father*. You see a lot of artists turning to abstraction later in life—I started out painting abstractly, so there's a part of me that thinks, 'Oh God, could I go back onto that road?' I think you get to a certain point in your life where your story is different or maybe how much you want to communicate is different. I'm trying to figure that out."

To say that Tabitha Vevers was born into an art dynasty may sound a little grandiose, but it's not too far off. With ties back to the legendary Sun Gallery in the late 1950s (before he was a founder and mainstay of Provincetown's fabled Long Point Gallery, along with

Robert Motherwell), her father, Tony Vevers, was unmistakable with his famous handlebar mustache. Vevers was a quietly powerful figure painter who pushed his later work into abstraction, using sand and found objects. He created a sense of personal myth with an understated elegiac tone using muted color and simple flat forms to mine a narrative of people and place that reflected back to his role as a studious advocate of the Provincetown art scene as a writer, teacher, firsthand custodian, and participant for over fifty years.

Vevers's mother, Elspeth Halvorsen, a notable sculptor of wonderfully poetic, somewhat cosmic environments set in elegant box constructions, is still living and working in the house on Bradford Street they purchased from Mark Rothko in 1963. It's the house where Tabitha and her older sister, Stephanie, spent their summers "coming of age during the late '60s, early '70s." Life in Provincetown was unabashedly "bohemian." That was their norm—most of her friends' parents were artists and writers, and talk of those times often elicits a hushed tone and reserved smile. "I never met an adult who wasn't an artist or a writer until I was in high school," she once told me. "One of my earliest memories is a show at the Sun Gallery and my parents and their friends were all sitting around the dinner table hand-painting announcement cards. Things were funkier then!" Elspeth made

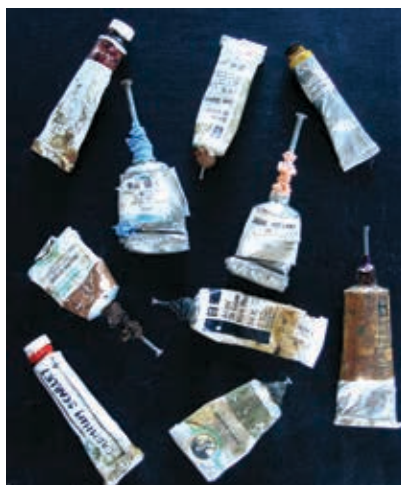
clothes for the family. "My mother taught me to sew when I was five or six," says Vevers, "and not many years after that, I was given a choice: make my own clothes or get them at the thrift shop." With her bedroom situated right next to the dining table, Vevers was privy to the parties her parents hosted with, as Halvorsen tells it, "lots of gin and tonics, singing, and reading Yeats."

"I would fall asleep to their dinner conversations, their drinking, singing, and storytelling. Those became my bedtime stories," Vevers recalls. "I grew up in the midst of my parents' community, seeing how artists lived and realizing that artists don't necessarily go around with paint on their clothes all the time. I grew up with that sense that art is an ongoing adventure or quest that isn't that separate from life, that everything's interwoven. The idea that one thing leads to another and everything that you do in your life feeds into your work."

This was her summer community. Days were spent at her local bayside beach, swimming, beachcombing, and drawing in the sand. "That was pretty much our playground," she recalls, "as my friends and I could all walk there from our summer homes in the East End. My parents would often take a lunch-swim-sun break there. There were tuna fish sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, and frozen orange juice mixed up in a mayonnaise bottle with clinking little glass jelly jars to drink it from. My favorite



Vevers in her Wellfleet studio



ocean beach was Herring Cove in P-town, which everyone called New Beach, because it was newly created at the time. I have vivid memories of big sunset cookouts with Jack and Wally Tworokov, and Elise and Stanley Kunitz.”

From time to time, she still makes it back to Herring Cove, “the champagne of beaches,” a term coined by her sister because of the perfect clarity and crispness of the water. Now that she and Ranalli live in Wellfleet, they go to Newcomb Hollow, but more often than not will head to one of the “secret” ponds scattered throughout Wellfleet and Truro. “I try to get in a swim every day—it’s what keeps me sane when the Cape gets crowded. It makes for a great quick and refreshing break from the studio,” she says. This past fall, she and a few friends extended the swimming season with the aid of wetsuits, gliding over dark waters under the luminous turn of the leaves.

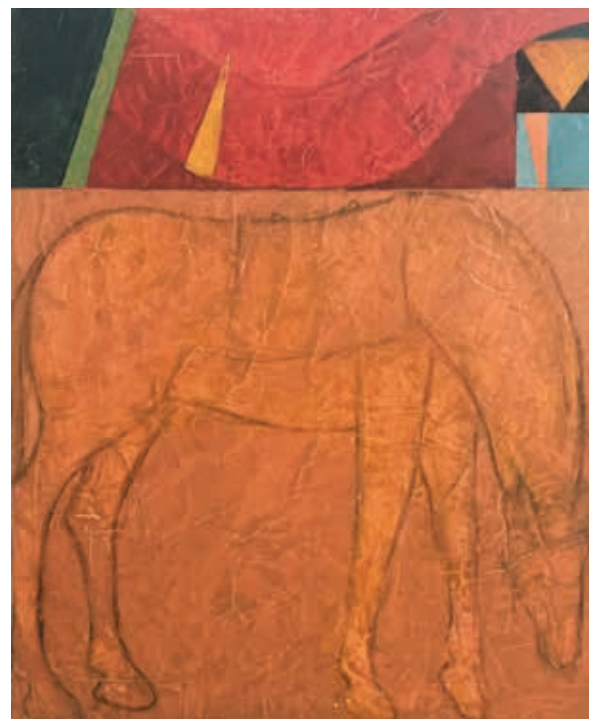
In 1964, Tony Vevers was offered a teaching position at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. And so began an oscillating cycle of summers in Provincetown and the academic year in Indiana. He was to stay at Purdue for twenty-five years teaching art history, painting, drawing, and African art until his early retirement in 1988. Tabitha hated it. “I cried all the way back to Indiana,” she says. “One year, I tried to draw a map so I could find my way back.”

If anything, being away from the water and the milieu of artistic camaraderie only further galvanized her connection to Provincetown. “I always felt more connected to P-town than to the Midwest, and certainly my parents did as well,” she says. “We would have to start school each year a couple of weeks late and leave a couple of weeks early to match up with my father’s teaching schedule at Purdue. I was spoiled by the long summer—and could never conceptualize taking on a full-time job as a result.” For the family as a whole, Provincetown

represented the center and comfort of their creative worlds.

Although Vevers was never tempted as an artist to focus her work on landscape painting, with the wraparound horizon and dazzling interplay of light and water that occurs at the tip of the Cape, water is nevertheless integral to her world. The shallow bays that form the setting for many of her narratives are not unlike parts of the Outer Cape, with its gentle sandy beaches, scrawny beach grass, rocky embellishments, and an underwater terrarium of plant life. The water is usually flat, preternaturally calm and benign, an appearance sometimes at odds with the drama before us, sometimes not. The biomorphic, hermaphroditic adaptations of the figures in the *Eden* paintings may look startling, but the demeanor of the figures is in alignment with the smooth ripples of the water. Standing knee-deep, they appear settled and content here, and you can’t help but think of Vevers wading into one of her “secret” ponds and slipping into the waters of a place she too calls home.

While Tabitha Vevers’s work is not site specific, it still references the Cape, but obliquely: for instance, she adopted the use of scrimshaw in *A History of Cloning (The Creation of Eves)* and the *Women & Knives* series (both in 1998), and her paintings of giant lobsters and squid on seashells make reference to, among other things, her time growing up and selling painted seashells on the streets of Provincetown. If she is using a model, it is art history itself, quoting its formats and forms, the artists and their models and mediums, reaching back to come forward



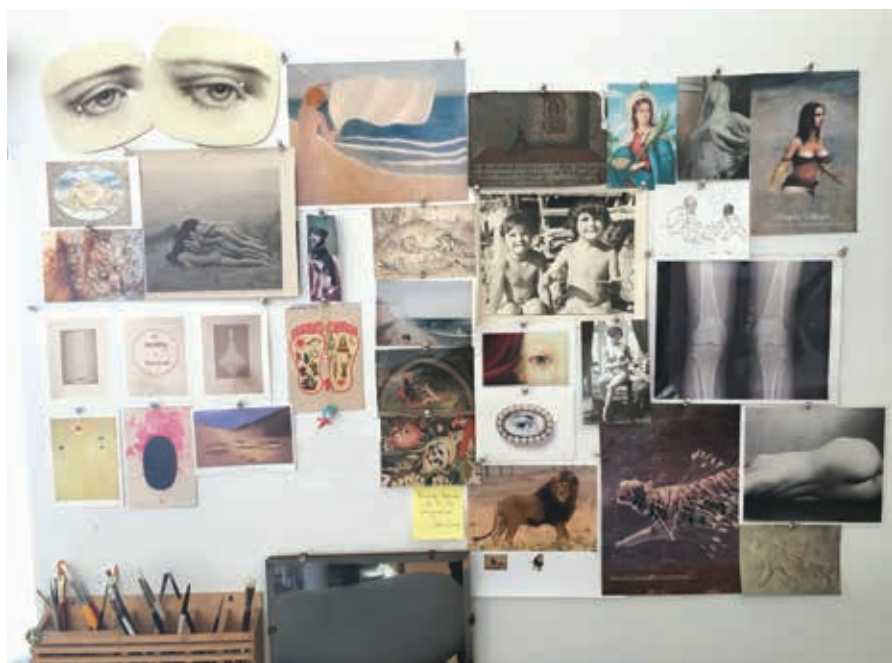
Journey, 1983, oil and mixed media on panel, 48 by 39 inches COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

and single-mindedly repurposing the past to talk about the present so that her work exists more within a stream of history than it does within a specific place.

“Something I realized working on the deCordova show was the extent to which art history runs through my work, from my early icon paintings to the use of appropriation and the more conceptual work,” she recalls. “I think that was an influence from my dad because he was very involved with it and taught art history as well as studio art, which is pretty unusual. I was kind of weaned on art history; my parents took us to museums when we were kids and to me it was always a treat. I continued my study of art history in college.”

While her parents’ creative influence is clear, Vevers is nothing if not her own person. “There was an influence there, but I felt free to do what I wanted to do,” she says. “Looking back, I realize the figurative and mythological influences I got from my dad’s work, and the resourceful use of materials and the physicality of things I got from my mother’s work. Those are two very diverse, different influences but there’s that thread. When I was in college, I felt, like everyone else, that I needed something to push against, which is hard when your parents are both artists. I think I was pushing back with the overt sensuality of the work, with the edgy quality of it.”

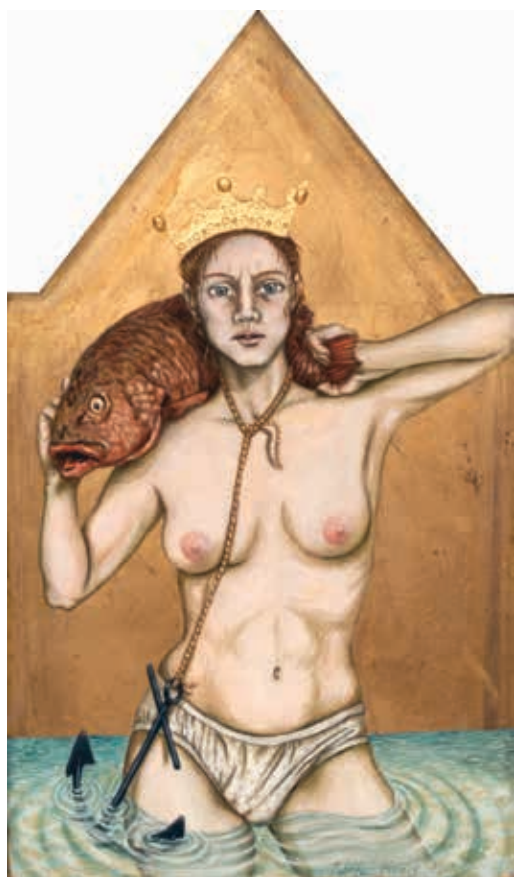
Vevers’s relationship to art history is key to understanding her sociopolitical and personal agendas. What started to inform Vevers’s worldview was the traditionally skewed editing of art history to a predominantly male perspective. “There’s definitely the feminist side to it,” she explains. “Our art textbooks were filled with female nudes but no works by women. That whole aspect is hard-wired into me, but I’ve also always felt that my work was more personal than political—so it’s really both.”



Cambridge studio wall in 2016

When she transferred from Indiana University to Yale in 1975, graduating three years later, she was painting loosely with big brushes on large canvases in an abstract style with figurative references—but, according to Vevers, it didn't feel right. It was like walking in someone else's shoes, most likely male shoes, doing work she felt she should be doing, in line with prevailing discussions around painting at the time. "I just didn't feel like I could work figuratively or narratively. . . . I think it was partly the school and partly me," she says. "Definitely, narrative work was not going to fly at Yale." What it did give her, however, was direction, if only by encouraging her to reject a middle path in order to create her own.

After graduating, Vevers received a scholarship from Yale to attend the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in Maine, where she studied fresco. From there, she moved to Somerville, set up studio space, and joined the artist-run Bromfield Gallery, founded in 1975 and still thriving today. Vevers's work began to move from abstraction to flat paintings of walls with no illusion of space. There's a painting hanging in her Cambridge home from that time that depicts the simple outline of a horse set below broad abstract shapes of flat primary color. She calls it "a transitional painting," with one foot still in the abstract camp, the other moving toward representation, with the elements starting to fall into place. The art history is there in its fresco-like quality and a specific reference to a Giotto painting with "a little bit of Fritz Bultman," but it's still painted on a larger scale.



Secular Icons: The Art of Survival, 1989, oil and gold leaf on wood panel, 18 by 12 inches COLLECTION OF ALIX RITCHIE AND MARTY DAVIS

She noticed while gallery-sitting at the Bromfield that some people didn't appear to connect with the work. Instead of stepping in, giving the pieces attention, and engaging, they would step back briefly before turning away altogether. There was barely a "hello," let alone a conversation. She wanted to pull people in, have them stay a while: "I didn't know it then, but I wanted to communicate. For example, I loved the strong, emotionally resonant feeling I got from Rothko's work. I wanted to invoke that in people, but couldn't do it abstractly. I realized that I was being drawn to these pre-Renaissance paintings because I was drawn to the narrative. It took me a while to give myself permission to do that work. In my painting *Living With Life*, the figure begins to appear in the form of shadows cast upon the walls. In 1983, when I was working in a large studio during a residency at the MacDowell Colony, the figure busts out in larger works done with oil stick and waxy, troweled layers of color—something like the frescoed walls of Pompeii."

This turn to narrative work began when Vevers moved to Provincetown year-round in the mid-1980s. The pre-Renaissance work Vevers is passionate about is small and intimate but with a power to pull you in and hold you with a colorful story rendered in colorful detail. In tracing her career, it's important to note that the smaller and more refined her work became, the more potent it became. As the brushes became smaller, and the painting became tighter, she learned that it was more powerful to speak quietly than to exclaim loudly.

There's a telling story from this period, when Vevers first applied to the Fine Arts Work Center residency program with ten slide images: with her work in transition, she submitted five abstract images and five figurative. When she was told she would have been accepted if she'd submitted ten abstract images, it only strengthened her commitment to figurative and narrative painting. This resolution bore fruit in her early series *Secular Icons*, securing her intention to reclaim the female figure from the clutches of male objectification and reflect it back through her own experience and the lens of art history so that the work would become recognizably her own. Many pieces are



Secular Icons: What We Call Sleep, 1991, oil and gold leaf on wood relief, 18.75 by 15 inches COLLECTION OF DEENA GERSON

painted on wooden reliefs that resemble medieval altarpieces; some are painted on cement as a nod to fresco, and others on small handmade sheets of paper reminiscent of manuscripts. The figures have a taut look, strong and a little ghostly. These pieces are theatrical, with painted curtains, trompe l'oeil effects, parts of the painting that extend physically beyond the picture plane, and an often chaotic world of objects and props that accompany the protagonists on their journey. One could spend a few hours deciphering the cryptology and symbolism of golden crowns, restless sleep, the burden of carrying a dory on your back, spilt glasses of wine, Tantric eggs, and lotus flowers. Beauty and aesthetics aside, it's a big part of what keeps you engaged, an infinite cycle of associations and lateral conversations.

Vevers creates a language, building a personal vocabulary while pulling us in with compelling tales about the struggles and transitions in life, political and sexual commentary rendered in high color, clean detail, and the richness of gold leaf. In works such as *The Art of Survival*, 1989, or *Lightening the Load*, 1991, the female protagonists are like warriors, golden-crowned goddesses with shameless unabashed strength, but a strength that also contains vulnerability. Burdened by a heavy anchor around the neck or a backbreaking load of symbolic commitments and obligations, they struggle without complaint as they not only persevere, but prosper over adversity.

As the *Secular Icons* series progressed into the '90s, the work gathered complexity and detail in painted reliefs such as *What We Call Sleep*, 1991. Made to look like a mock window, with a sill at the bottom of the frame that tilts forward



When We Talk About Rape IV, 2009, oil and gold leaf on Mylar, 10.875 by 14.875 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION

slightly, the three-dimensionality refers less to altarpieces than it does to Vevers's bread-and-butter days working as a carpenter, remodeling houses, framing and trimming windows. There's a painted blind pulled a third of the way down to show a scene within a square behind it, bursting with objects and events. In a somewhat comic-book tableaux about the first Gulf War, a young couple in bed are tossed above a stream of violence and images that reflect the casual attrition of a media war—George Bush Sr.'s talking head on a television, rivers of fire, steely-tipped bombs, Old Glory, a pair of ruby-red slippers, and the dark coil of a serpent wrapped around the bed frame—all jostling for attention in a hyperbole of chaos.

Vevers could take the easy route and work a line of more populist work, but a seductive groove soon becomes a empty rut and her intention is to provoke, to wake us up from our complacency to the dangers and stresses of the contemporary world. It would be equally easy for her to err on the side of illustration, but there are riches beyond the sheer beauty of the work. There's something very devotional and thorough in what Vevers does, from the research, to the care in choosing her materials, to the slow persistent layering of paint that creates depth and reveals other layers of perception. She finds the process meditative. "People have said 'you must be so patient to do such detailed paintings,' and it's really the opposite," she says. "It gives me an inner calm. I feel so much better after I work. It's a kind of total focus and yet it's not all about control. It's focusing and being there for the work."

When We Talk About Rape, 1992, is all edge, shock, and revulsion, as a mermaid lies across a cold hard bed of gray rock, her head slung back, arm across her face, her tail sliced and splayed open to reveal the

gleaming deep cut of bloody red flesh clinging to her bones. It's a hard image to look at, deadly and effective, the impact immediate and wrenching. She has painted it several times, each time the depiction no less horrific. The 2009 update is set within an Eden-like environment that broadens this unconscionable act to include "raping the environment," an alarming, living reality.

By 1993, *Secular Icons* started to play itself out before reaching a conceptual cul-de-sac. "It became a little oppressive," she explains. "I felt like I had painted myself into a corner." She cleared the slate during her Fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center (1995–96), moving into

a bigger studio and responding with a new series that became *Flesh Memories*, which marked the beginning of building a stronger conceptual backbone in her work. "I think working in series, identifying groups of work and having a conceptual basis underlying them, came out of that time. It gives you structure and something to push against and play around within," she says. You see this best in her use of materials—reclaiming something discarded to create something valuable has been a pervasive thread over the years. "It really goes all the way back," she says. "I think I get that resourcefulness and playfulness from my mother because she always had fun using found materials."

Like her earlier wall paintings, this work featured large wooden panels with fresco-like surfaces that Vevers built up with layers of gesso, modeling paste, and careful calibrations of translucent color infused into the prepared surface. If *Secular Icons* portrayed the burdens we carry and the scars we inherit, then *Flesh Memories* made an attempt to literally transcribe these scars of experience onto the body by pushing the female figure right up close to the picture plane and focusing on the torso. No head, no limbs, hands, or feet, just an anonymous field of flesh, breasts, a soft belly, bony ribs, pubis, and buttocks, the torso a blank canvas, an open page that can reveal an accounting and accumulation of experience. As in the yoga expression "there are issues in our tissues," we see the emotional belly, the psychological and physical scarring symbolized by a breast covered by a bull's-eye peppered and indented with multiple hits in *Target*, 1996; or in *Eggshells*, 1996, in which a half dozen cracked eggs are laid out across a belly in a triangulation that reflects the fragile limits of the reproductive system beneath.



Flesh Memories: Making Pink, 1996, oil and mixed media on wood panel, 45 by 60 inches COLLECTION OF EDWIN SHERIN AND JANE ALEXANDER



Flesh Memories: Eggshells, 1996, oil and mixed media on wood panel, 18 by 24 inches COLLECTION OF ARLETTE AND GUS KAYAFAS

At five feet across, *Making Pink*, 1996, is the largest piece in the series, set up as multiple frames within one narrative, not unlike the way Tony Vevers would organize some of his paintings. It also feels somewhat mythic, like a Roman fresco, two figures acquiescing to the close press of sexual desire surrounded by a soft embrace of leaves. Symbolizing the union of male and female, the right side panel depicts a milky substance being poured into a bowl of blood or wine. The narratives for *Flesh Memories* feel deeply personal, exploring the machinations of gender politics, sexuality, desire, and fecundity in a series of paintings that are equal parts strength and vulnerability. “It came out of the feeling of wanting to portray the female figure from the inside out,” Vevers explains. “The surface of the painting is the flesh of the figure, and then there’s the imagery of traces of experience embedded within it.”

Working in tandem with *Flesh Memories* are the pieces in the smaller series *Transient Anatomies*, intimate paintings on goatskin vellum, again

conceptualizing and incorporating the notion “that the flesh has a story to tell, the idea of an anatomical diary.” By literally painting on skin, Vevers has continued to expand upon the idea that her materials themselves have a story to tell in ways that support and extend her narrative. “One of the things I’ve played with over the years is the materials that I work on,” she says. “Because I paint in such a tight, detailed way, experimenting with different surfaces is a way of making it feel more loose, unpredictable. It changes the experience.”

It can also broaden the work and take it into new and unexpected areas. Case in point are the scrimshaw pieces she did, beginning in 1998, in which, like *Transient Anatomies*, process and material are integral to the content. Returning to intimate work and a full-length figure, *A History of Cloning (The Creation of Eves)*, 1998, reproduces the same image of Eve taken from a Lucas Cranach painting a dozen times, inscribed across twelve polished bones. In this way, Vevers makes



Flesh Memories: Target, 1996, oil and mixed media on wood panel, 25.5 by 18 inches COURTESY OF ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY

reference to each of Adam’s ribs: “It’s playing on art history and religion, but also the idea of cloning. The sheep named Dolly had just been cloned and was in the news. I repeated the drawing each day for twelve days and yet none are the same. When you clone something, it’s not the same—each version is growing up in a different time, existing in a different experience.”

For the scrimshaw work of the *Women & Knives* series in 1998, Vevers inscribed images of “women either in mythology or real life who had committed acts of violence using a knife.” She carved the portraits of twenty knife-wielding women—including Karla Faye Tucker, Lizzie Borden, Lucretia, Lorena Bobbitt, and Xena Warrior Princess—into knife-shaped bones that conceptually link the weapon with the bones of the victims. Here, process and material are intrinsic to



A History of Cloning (The Creation of Eves), 1998, scrimshaw on twelve bones, 11.75 by 20 inches COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST



Women & Knives: Lizzie Borden, 1998, scrimshaw on bone with mixed media, 10 by 2 by 2 inches COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST



Flying Dreams: Escape, 1999, oil on steel, 6 by 12 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION



Flying Dreams: Water Ballet (detail), 2000, oil on steel, 9 by 12 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION



Flying Dreams: Flying Lesson, 2000, oil and gold leaf on steel, 12 by 18 inches COLLECTION OF EDWIN SHERIN AND JANE ALEXANDER

her theme, the act of cutting into the bone giving voice to perpetrator and victim. It's an uncomfortable medium—in concept and, literally, in execution. “It’s really screechy, scratchy,” explains Ververs. “When you’re scrimshawing bone, the blade gets stuck in the pores. It’s not as smooth and soft as ivory.” But, again, the work executes its own tangent and that very uncomfortableness only serves to heighten the violence. “Each knife is encased in a wooden box with crimson padding,” she says. “So it’s at once a weapon case and a coffin.” While the pieces are drained of color and etched in a sharp nervous line, she makes up for the lack of chromatic layering by adding conceptual layering.

After the *Scrimshaw* series, Ververs moved on to another major series, *Flying Dreams*, which she painted from 1999 to 2003. Here, Ververs appropriated the traditional format of the Mexican ex-voto—a devotional painting that gives thanks for a blessing or miracle—that she first came across through her grandparents, also artists, in San Miguel de Allende in Central Mexico. Taking devotional forms and applying them to a contemporary secular narrative is clearly one of her calling cards. In this work, Ververs gives “thanks for the miracle of flight” by devoutly painting—because that’s just the way she paints—real-life flying dreams in an established format. Traditional ex-votos were painted by itinerant painters on cheap and portable recycled tin with a description of the blessing written below. Ververs paints hers on copper and galvanized steel, a slippery memory committed to something with tangible heft, stable and solid so that she may honor the shared experience of the dream. A narrative text of the dream event runs along the bottom or side in Ververs’s carefully refined cursive, maintaining the charm of the traditional ex-voto’s folksiness and the way the paint casually meets the edge of the metal substrate beneath.

“I collected these dreams for years before I knew what I was going to do with them,” she explains, “getting friends and acquaintances to write down their flying dreams for me. It was pre-Internet when I started.” After the monochromatic heaviness of her *Scrimshaw* series, a return to full color feels liberating. These pieces are open and free, funny and surreal, vaguely cartoonish crowd-pleasers that bring compelling stories and visuals together to create some of her best work. You have a sense Ververs loved making these, and there’s a palpable thrill in her articulation of another person’s dream memory, a lucidity that we can feel and only she can voice. We can share in the absurdity, the disbelief, the sheer magic, the fear, the queasy embarrassment, and the joy because it comes from a place of truth, a dream reality that, for the dreamer, actually happened.

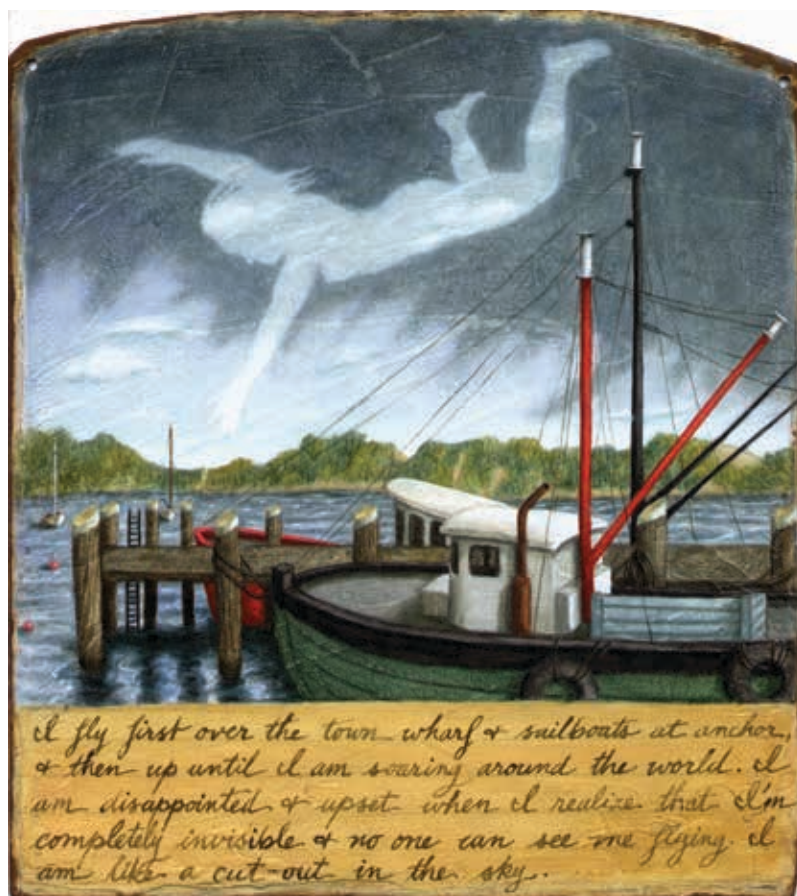
People duck and dive, pirouette and levitate; arms extend, multiply, and flap; and skill sets range from confident and

Flying Dreams represents Tabitha Vevers at the height of her powers (so far . . .). Similar to Mexican ex-votos, Tabitha's metal panels convey a completely realistic—if imaginary—depiction of the dream world. Horses can fly, lovers hover, and fear itself soars miraculously out the window, and off into the ozone. All of us share the embarrassment of suddenly showing up at a formal party or final exam stark naked, or the delight of sharing an intimate reunion with a long-lost friend or stranger, or the feeling of power when rising above our detractors (literally) overhead, in our dreams. Tabitha captures all of these nocturnal, sub-conscious emotions in her elegant, lucid, deadpan style.

In keeping with much of her other work over the years . . . there is a passion and care for detail that shines through. Her craft is inseparable from her content. Like Tabitha herself, there is a rich and colorful story of everywoman—and superwoman—interwoven throughout these pieces. Mermaids and angels mingle with fisherwomen and sailors. In the fertile tradition of Frida Kahlo, Kiki Smith, and Annette Messenger, Tabitha creates a universe of her own vivid, personal mythology, especially as it pertains to her heritage of growing up in Provincetown, a village by the sea.

—Nick Lawrence

Originally published in the 2002 exhibition catalogue for *Flying Dreams* at the DNA Gallery.



Flying Dreams: Invisible, 2000, oil on steel, 9 by 8 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION



Flying Dreams: In the Dunes, 2003, oil and gold leaf on galvanized steel, 8 by 12 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION

agile to hesitant and hilarious. Throughout it all, most flyers appear unnaturally calm, as though they've done this before—you only need to reach a dream state to get there. However, just because these are fun and lighter in tone doesn't mean they're lightweight. The experience of sharing such privately unconscious flights of fancy is in and of itself an open and vulnerable gesture that's quietly moving. Vevers has noted common threads, such as women's joy in finding themselves weightless, men's pride in a particular flying technique, and "an almost universal fear of telephone wires." Collectively, they circumscribe a community of dreamers, ordinary people experiencing an extraordinary moment of absolute freedom by overcoming gravity. "While working on the dreams," she says, "I felt the web of connections between dreamers of all sorts as well as a sense of gratitude. I learned from all of them and ultimately became an expert flyer myself."

Vevers's collection of flying dreams numbers in the hundreds, and she has committed several of her own to the series. *Escape*, 1999, was one of the first, "the one that sort of inspired the series," she says, depicting her evasion of an unseen imminent threat, soaring naked over a canopy of exotic trees with arms outstretched in a gesture of both fear and exhilaration. *Water Ballet*, 2000, finds her rising out of the water like a free-spirited water nymph to perform "backward arabesques" in a "diaphanous Botticelli-like dress," while Dan looks on incredulously.

In the Dunes, 2003, is a beauty, with Vevers taking a vertiginous turn across the dunes under a sky of gold like a superhero to the rescue, a hammer in one hand and her carpenter's apron slung at the ready below her waist. Even with a black tank top, blue jeans, and bare feet, she still looks like any number of angelic figures from a pre-Renaissance painting, with a thin filigree of gold around her form like a gilded aura. "I dreamt that I saw these guys trying to build a boat," she explains, laughing out loud. "I was trying to tell them how to do it right because they were completely screwing it up!" She would know, having hand-built such a vessel herself, just one of those tidbits that Vevers drops as casually as chitchat about the weather.

Strung together, these paintings form a nocturnal narrative that's cinematic, richly theatrical. The humor's there, but it's blended with profundity, psychological probing, conceptual and aesthetic layering, and Vevers's no-holds-barred approach to painting that gives her work a living, breathing quality.

The *Flying Dreams* series lasted about four years, but in the end Vevers needed to get back to her own story: "I felt like I was working too much with somebody else's imagery." In the *Shell* series, begun in 2004, Vevers continued to use her materials in a way that conceptually carried and extended her narrative, treating the shell in a devotional way, gilding the intimate apse-like interior but framing a personal narrative with tall tales of glutinous fish, mermaids, selkies, lionesses with long slender tails, and their sexual congress with giant squid and lobsters set among the shallows of sand and sea.

Vevers's appropriation of seashells goes all the way back to her childhood. There's the obvious ubiquitous Cape Cod connection as well as the seaside setting of the narratives painted on them, but as a material the sea clam, oyster, and scallop shells she uses also have deep associations and connections. "First of all, the seashell starts out as a container of life," she explains,



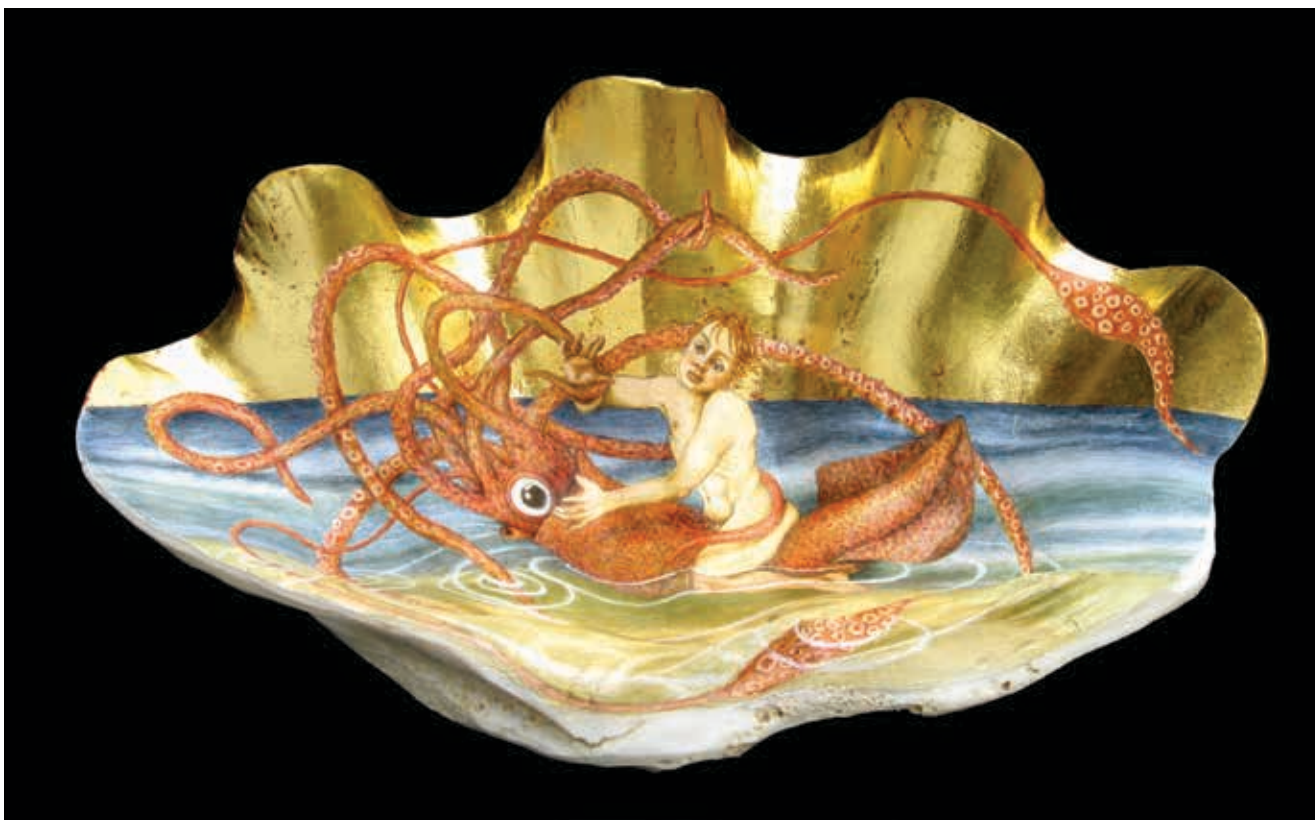
Shell: The Inscrutable Lover II, 2004, oil and gold leaf on sea clam shell, 4.5 by 6 by 1.75 inches
COLLECTION OF LAURA LEE BROWN AND STEVE WILSON



Shell: Safe Harbor, 2005, oil and gold leaf on sea clam shell, 3.25 by 5.25 by 1 inches
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST



Shell: Rapture, 2005, oil and gold leaf on sea clam shell, 4.75 by 6.75 by 1.25 inches
COLLECTION OF LISE MOTHERWELL AND R. S. STEINBERG



Shell: *Wild Ride*, 2005, oil and gold leaf on giant clamshell, 6 by 10.5 by 3 inches COLLECTION OF COPEY COPPEDGE

“as does an eggshell. It contains life, so that’s not detritus—and then, of course, you break it open, the clam dies, and the shell becomes detritus. So it goes from being something incredibly precious to something that’s just garbage and then something that’s precious again, not unlike Fabergé eggs.”

The *Shell* series is significant in that it marks the beginning of several characters Vevers continues to feature today, albeit in a revised context. “My relationship to the lobsters keeps changing,” she says. “The very first one I painted was on a shell. It was called *The Inscrutable Lover*, and there was the idea of an exoskeleton that you have to break through to get to the soft part. In the beginning, they weren’t really that sexual or sensual, but then, as I started painting them, I realized, ‘Oh my God, there are all those limbs to work with!’” Looking through further encounters with lobsters is like witnessing the stages of a relationship, from the first meeting in *Inscrutable Lover*, to the building of trust in *Safe Harbor*, 2005, to the sexual apotheosis of *Rapture*, also in 2005.

A young man’s tryst with a giant squid in *Wild Ride*, 2005, is more ambiguous, teetering on that flip-flop between pleasure and pain, perhaps with a little of both. To Vevers’s credit, nothing is ever spelled out, and associations are allowed to roam free: “I think that dichotomy is something that runs throughout my work. This goes back to the original inspiration years ago, the early Italian pre-Renaissance paintings—they’re beautifully painted, so detailed and lovingly done, but a lot of the time they’re painful subjects so there’s beauty and agony, the idea that you laugh and then you see another level and you cry.”

Multiple interpretations, multiple layers of meaning all point to the complexity of her work. The image of the lioness, a woman with long thin tails, has also become an enduring figure. “Giving a lion’s tail to a female figure is a way of giving power to this figure,” she says, even if the figure is not necessarily in a powerful situation. In the *Shell* paintings these figures seem vulnerable—they seem unaware of, and perhaps are not recognized for, the power and beauty they inherently carry. In *Love Me Anyway*, 2004, and *The Somber Lioness*, 2006, they appear disenfranchised, hungry for belonging.

It wasn’t until Vevers was near the end of her *Shell* series that she discovered *kaiawase*, a Japanese game of concentration practiced by nobility and popular during the Edo period (1615–1868), which involved matching images from the two halves of the same seashell.

“They painted on them and they used gold leaf,” she says. “So I did one piece using both halves of a shell. There’s a male half and a female half, and the way a matched pair fit perfectly together, the little hinge really is almost male/female. In the *kaiawase* tradition, the top half is considered male and the bottom half female.”

The *Shell* paintings are among her most intimate, in execution and presentation. Preparing the surfaces, cupping them in her palm as she painstakingly lays in gold leaf and the smallest of details, Vevers forms a relationship with the work, an intimacy that she passes into it and on to us. This means of production, held close and personal, is the same condition she wants the viewer to have. One on one, a conversation at times tough, other times tender. In some ways this laid the groundwork for the *Eden* series to follow in 2006—the ocean setting, anchored by the horizon line, the lion’s tail caught between the legs of remorse and despair are all there—but everything unfolds on a bigger stage. This grew into some of her more “difficult” and at the same time most rewarding work, and it shows Vevers broadening her personal and political base by entering into an exploration of science, religion, and the possibility of a global calamity befalling our planet.

“The *Eden* series was really all about the environment and how we’re going to evolve and survive a postapocalyptic environment with global climate change. But it was inspired by the conflict I felt at the idea that creationism might be taught in school alongside evolution, as though the theory of evolution hasn’t been proven,” she says, with measured sarcasm. “I couldn’t believe that this was happening in my lifetime.”

The genesis for the *Eden* series was a doodle Vevers did in the middle of the night, a casual subconscious volley of “two amoeba-like figures” that’s remarkably similar to the painting it became, *Amoebayouba*. It lit a fire that continues to burn today. “The whole idea was to create figures that are at once male and female, but also amoeba-like,” she recalls. “It’s ecology, biology, and evolution, and also Adam and Eve, and the idea of Eve being created from Adam. The whole *Eden* series became about gender issues as well as the environment and religious conflict, bringing them all together.”

These figures are caught in a happenstance of evolution, mutant amorphous forms that have adapted to a toxic environment of sulphuric gold skies, the heavy drip of acid rain, and tall chimneys working overtime churning out bilious clouds of gray and black smoke. To us, it’s



Eden: Amoebayouba, 2007, oil and gold leaf on ivory, 8 by 9.5 inches COLLECTION OF ANDREW MELLEN

the color of death, but the figures inhabiting this brave new world seem far from discontented. Their appearance is initially alarming, a merging of several figures to create an approximation of one: hermaphroditic, with smooth pale skin, bulbous—sometimes twin—heads, multiple limbs,

extra breasts, at once infant and adult. The work is unapologetic and strong, though paintings like *Mammae*, 2007, and *Mammaesupeal*, 2007, are loving and tender, while *Eveandadam*, 2007, seems positively idyllic. “I never wanted my work to be solely political,” Vevers says. “I want it to



Eden: Eveandadam, 2007, oil and gold leaf on ivory, 9.375 by 10 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION

be emotional and edgy, with lots and lots of different layers.”

The *Eden* series is painted on Mylar and ivory, a synthetic form of ivory produced in thin, milky-looking sheets. “The material is so subtle and soft,” says Vevers. “You don’t gesso it, you just work on it directly. It has this little bit of thickness but it also has translucency. It was designed for early portraiture so you get incredibly luminous flesh tones. I do a lot of drawings because I have to map out the painting, especially because of the gold leaf and the way I paint with transparent glazes. I sketch it out and then I lay in some of the color, working back and forth, adding shadow and deeper tones very gradually.”

Just because the work is preconceived doesn’t make it predestined. There’s a flexibility with enough room built in to accommodate changes within the work. “A certain amount of myself has to go into it before it’s done and then it’s separate from me—the work directs itself at some point. Obviously, I set it up very deliberately, but then something completely intuitive will happen.” She extends the luminosity of the work by framing everything in pristine white box frames, a clean surgical presentation that matches the futuristic presentation of the painted stage. The theatrical quality is still there, as it has been since *Secular Icons*, but now it’s been allowed to slip in silently between the painting and the viewer, a process of seamless integration.

As a material, gold leaf in all its tonal variations—white gold, pale gold, moon gold—continues to be intrinsic to Vevers’s work. What initially drew her to it was less a self-conscious link back to art history than an extension of her natural curiosity to try a new material. “I had just been looking at so many of those early images that I was intrigued to try it,” she says, “and once you add gold into a painting it becomes both the brightest part of the painting and the darkest, depending on how you look at it. That shift really intrigued me—it’s like having two paintings in one.”

This idea of light and dark, positive and negative, in the same spot on a painting is indicative of how Vevers uses gold, primarily as sky or, more recently, as flat abstract shapes, such as in the curvaceous turns of the speech bubble in *Marriage (I Can’t Hear You, I’m Peeing)*, 2009, which is painted on ivory. Mercurial thing that it is, gold leaf has the uncanny ability not only to reflect light but also to absorb it, the color shifting, depending on where you stand, from soft white, to a dull gray, to a lustrous green. Because the light is not static, an expansive sky of gold can be bright and open one moment, dim and closed the next.

What is surprising is that Vevers’s stride back through art history often finds a serendipitous link in the most unexpected of ways. “Another layer of dialogue,” she calls

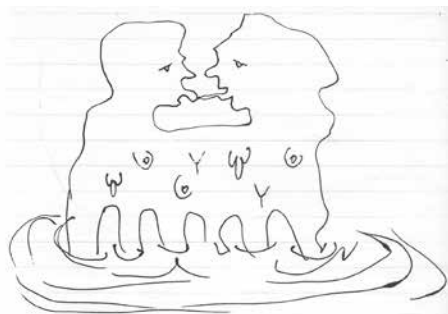


Eden: Mammaesupel, 2007, oil and gold leaf on ivory, 11.5 by 9.5 inches
COLLECTION OF JEROME SHAW

it. Halfway through painting *Marriage (I Can't Hear You, I'm Peeing)* (see page 52), she realized that the composition with a figure sitting on a toilet evoked the elderly woman seated in James McNeill Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1*, 1871, popularly known as *Whistler's Mother*. "That was completely unintentional, but once I realized this I thought I'd play with that idea, the muted color and the proportions."

These connections are always subtle and never in the forefront, integrating a dialogue with history that allows her voice to reexamine and unite the past to the present as part of a larger conversation. "I have a take on art history," she explains. "I want to recontextualize it, make it my own from a contemporary perspective. I think it's important to be in a dialogue with the times. Even though my work may not always look contemporary, the dialogue is contemporary."

VEVERS PAINTED HER first *Lover's Eyes* series in 2000. Eye portraiture was a Georgian practice started in the late 1700s to commemorate the eye of a loved one, and these portraits were often commissioned as "trades of the heart" for secret lovers. "I had heard about them on *Antiques Roadshow*," she says. "I was so intrigued by it, and carried that idea around—though I didn't know how I was going to use it."



The sketch that started the *Eden* series

In the first series, Vevers's revival of the form focused on using the eyes of women as they had been painted by men throughout art history, and, in doing so, she reestablished the primacy of the gaze away from the artist and back to the model. It's a powerful notion that makes for some of her most moving work, smart and deeply resonant on a human level. In the early pieces, she adhered to a more traditional form, painting them on the material used for the original lovers' eyes, recycled piano key ivory, and fashioning them into locket frames that she then set within period frames ranging from simple to ornate. Amalgams of archiving, painting, and jewelry, pieces such as *Madame Leblanc (after Ingres)*, 2004, and *Victorine Meurent (after Manet)*, 2004, are each a precious one and a half inches in diameter across the

confines of the silver bezels that secure them.

Stepping in close to these works—for there is no other way if you really want to look someone in the eye—is one of the most intimate art encounters you can experience. What you see first is Madame Leblanc; then you see the painter, Ingres. In the limpid blue pool of her gaze, everything else becomes extraneous, and we can comfortably drop into our own projections as we search for a connection to the person behind the stare. Such a seemingly simple concept could appear underhanded, an easy conceit, but what Vevers achieves in her typically layered fashion is an art historical sleight of hand that emasculates the artist and empowers the model. Nothing short of a miracle.

As a barometer of emotional and physical conditions, the eye tells us so much, both real and imagined. Vevers is masterful at isolating and drawing that out: we can feel the swoon of *La Magdalena (after Titian)*, 2008, with its ornate gold tintype frame that only intensifies the emotion. These are not mere copies of their source material—there's a certain magic in how Vevers is able to infuse her own hand, her delicate painterly DNA, into the work. "When appropriating someone else's work, I enjoy painting it in my own style," she says. "I'm experiencing the work in real time, with a full immersion in the experience, so it becomes a dialogue between me and the artist and me and the original model too."

What is unexpected about this series is its complexity and longevity. As of now, Vevers has painted over a hundred eyes across five different eye series since she started in 2000, expanding its range with several variations. "It keeps evolving. Doing the eyes now has become a practice of returning," she says. "It's a breather, giving myself some space from the personal narrative, which can get a little intense sometimes." Her first run of *Lover's Eyes* ended in 2008, the year her father passed away, but she picked it up

again four years later, and it's been consistent ever since.

Lover's Eyes II, which includes the series *Gaze of Desire* and *Water's Edge*, expanded the range of her source imagery to encompass five hundred years of art history—Michelangelo to Basquiat—and changed the gaze to that of men depicting men. There are lots of highlights here: the piercing intensity of *Mark (after David Armstrong)*, 2012; the soft innocence of *Frédéric (after Pierre et Gilles)*, 2013. "It became an investigation of the cloaked male gaze," Vevers explains. "I ended up with a lot of artists from the '30s." She was particularly moved by Thomas Eakins's 1889 portrait of Douglass Morgan Hall, capturing a marked sensitivity that she repeats in *Arnold II (after Grant Wood)*, 2013, and John Singer Sargent's portrait of W. Graham Robertson from 1894, taking note of Sargent's alleged homosexuality and the difference between his commissioned work and the work he did of his close friends: "His portraits of his friends, who are often men, have a whole different quality to them. They're so personal and so expressive."

Vevers's fascination with the Lee Miller, Man Ray, Picasso triangle—the intimate connections between Picasso, Man Ray, and the woman they photographed and painted—led to the series *Lover's Eyes III: Picasso/Man Ray*. "I was really intrigued with Man Ray and Lee Miller's



Lover's Eyes: Madame Leblanc (after Ingres), 2004, oil on recycled ivory with silver bezel, 6 by 4 inch oval PRIVATE COLLECTION



Lover's Eyes: La Magdalena (after Titian), 2008, oil on ivory, 1.875 by 2.25 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION



Lover's Eyes II: Mark (after David Armstrong), 2012, oil on ivory, 2.625 by 4.75 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION



Lover's Eyes IV: Ann (after Warhol), 2014, oil on ivory, 2.75 by 3.5 inches
COURTESY OF ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY

relationship and the imagery that came out of that,” she says. “She feels like a contemporary figure.” Vevers had painted Man Ray’s image of Lee Miller as far back as 2004, before Lee’s eye found its way onto the pendulum of several of Vevers’s metronome pieces. In *Checkmate (Man and Lee)*, 2008, she reprises Man Ray’s *Object of Destruction*, 1923, which Ray had instructed should be destroyed with a single blow from a hammer, a violent and symbolic act of vengeance. Vevers supplies the hammer with Man Ray’s eye painted onto the face of its head so that one blow becomes mutual destruction.

She pits the former lovers against one another again in a short film entitled *DUÆL: Lee + Man*, done in collaboration with Anthony Sherin. It features dueling metronomes with their respective eyes defiantly swinging back and forth with a very precise tick, and very clear tock, that must say something about interpersonal relationships and endurance. What Vevers sets up with *Lover’s Eye III* casts a bigger net by going deeper into a smaller circle and noting the dichotomy of feeling between the two men toward the same women. They make a striking contrast: Lee Miller’s eyes, full of the seductive melancholy that Man Ray captures so well in the soft tonality of his photographs, beautifully rendered by Vevers to capture her sleepy and sensual cool, set against Picasso’s hot, graphic exuberance and sharp color.

In 2014, *Salt-Water-Tears* became the fourth *Lover’s Eyes* series, a meditation on empathy using tears. “I started looking for crying eyes,” Vevers explains. “Other than crying Madonnas there’s almost none in art history. It’s sort of kitsch. It’s like the last taboo.” In this series, Vevers expanded her range to include film stills—Johnny Depp from John Waters’s *Cry-Baby*; Janet Leigh from *Psycho*; Ann Buchanan from

her screen test for Andy Warhol—as well as unlikely sources, such as Margaret Keane, the painter of “big-eyed waifs” and the inspiration for Tim Burton’s film *Big Eyes*. “When I was doing the Margaret Keane piece, coming from the ’70s, that was the most kitschy painting. This was before the movie came out, and I was researching the story of her life—I realized she was painting her own pain. Her husband locks her in her room to paint, has her turn out these paintings, and then takes credit for them. Painting this was a surprisingly deep emotional experience for me.” She describes the impact of walking into the installation of her crying eyes at the Albert Merola Gallery: “It was like walking into a little chapel—partly because the eyes were crying but also because it was very tranquil, with all of these evenly spaced eyes hovering around the room. It was like the stations of the cross.”

Vevers’s selection process for *Lover’s Eyes* is impulsive and protracted at the same time. In working from a big pool, there’s volumes of research involved, paring choices down to the ones that work in a way that “feel expressive.” It takes time to establish a connection: “There’s the emotional resonance and knowing whether the eye is going to work.” She knows enough to avoid making them appear cross-eyed, but there are all manner of subtle considerations: “The cropping is very deliberate, and it can really change how the painting is read emotionally.” Vevers is also very specific about the thin edge of the ivory she leaves around each piece, a deliberate reference to the way photographers print their images to the full frame of the negative, showing that no cropping was done after the fact. Not all eyes face forward—some are downcast or ever so slightly askew so that you find yourself instinctively shifting your own gaze off to the side in order to



Lover's Eyes IV: Johnny (after John Waters), 2014, oil on ivory, 2.5 by 3 inches COLLECTION OF ANDREW MELLEN



Lover's Eyes IV: Margaret (after Margaret Keane), 2014, oil on ivory, 2.75 by 3.75 inches COLLECTION OF DEENA GERSON

catch the painted eye. Which is funny, because there are times when you catch a direct gaze and you find yourself doing the opposite and looking away, if only for a moment.

For her exhibition at the Lori Bookstein gallery last September, *Lover's Eyes: Selfies*, Vevers was drawn to less traditional self-portraits, coming up with a gorgeously alive mix that tapped art from Rembrandt and Van Gogh to Yayoi Kusama and Francesco Clemente, and creating an installation with a chronological grid of twenty images. The grid format picks up on the way our eyes scan, left, right, up, down, and as many variations as possible in between. It stimulates the roving eye and is quite different from a linear narrative that moves forward in a logical progression. "Being a detail person, how the images are juxtaposed becomes important to me," Vevers says. "I don't have total control of how they'll play out chronologically, but I really like that the Chuck Close is next to the Dana Schutz, and the juxtaposition of Jeff Koons and Basquiat. Polar opposites! Cynical Koons and the intense passionate Basquiat."

The cross-pollination of images weaves a kaleidoscopic tapestry of formal diversity and emotive proselytizing that surprised even Vevers: "They have an identity as a group and then, of course, they get sold off and separated. But it's wonderful to see them together—some are funny, some are not, and they're just pushed next to each other, with a kind of dialogue among themselves and art history."

The infinite gaze. There's something that's self-generating, self-perpetuating, about *Lover's Eyes*. When we met last fall, Vevers was still fresh off her *Selfies* show at Lori Bookstein and just emerging from a four-year immersion of doing almost nothing but the eyes. She was transitioning, hesitant about specific ideas but with a broad intention to return to the figurative narrative she slowly unspools. We arranged a final visit to her Cambridge studio in the loft she shares with Ranalli, a short walk from Porter Square. Things feel different. Spring is in the air. It's mild out and the streets have been recently scrubbed clean under a soft spring rain. We go up a flight of stairs past Dan's vintage tin toy car collection, into a soaring open space big enough to accommodate the living quarters as well. Vevers's balcony studio is perched up on a third level, next to the massive bank of a seventeen-foot skylight that looks down on the living area, and out over an urban landscape of sloping rooftops said to unknowingly inform her *Flying Dreams* series.

Like her Wellfleet studio, it's modest in size, well organized without being fussy. It's a working, breathing space with shelving to house materials small enough to fit into shoebox-sized Tupperware, a laptop, a small library of books, and enough counter space to lay out materials. There's a large table in the middle, where she paints facing a wall covered with works in progress next to another wall lined with white paper sheets of preliminary drawings in pencil, attached by small



DUEL: Lee + Man (after Man Ray + Lee Miller), 2013, oil on ivory with two metronomes, 8.75 by 4.5 by 4.5 inches each COURTESY OF ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY



PHOTO BY REBECCA M. ALVIN

(top to bottom)
Lover's Eyes V: Jean-Michel (Basquiat), 2015, oil on ivory, 2.5 by 4 inches COURTESY OF LORI BOOKSTEIN FINE ART
Lover's Eyes V: Jeff (Koons), 2015, oil on ivory, 2.5 by 3.25 inches COURTESY OF LORI BOOKSTEIN FINE ART
Lover's Eyes V: Yayoi (Kusama), 2015, oil on ivory, 2.5 by 4.25 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION
 Vevers at her show at the Albert Merola Gallery in Provincetown, 2014



Marriage (I Can't Hear You, I'm Peeing), 2011, oil and gold leaf on ivory, 8.5 by 10.5 inches
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST



Bananaman: To the Rescue, 2010, oil and gold leaf on Mylar, 11 by 14.25 inches COURTESY OF ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY

clips hung on a string like a clothesline, some recognizable from the paintings in her *Eden* series.

“Now that I’m getting back to the figurative work, I think I’m coming at it from a different place and I just want more space within the work,” she explains. “I’m returning to it in an organic kind of way, and it’s making sense to me, not feeling lost so much as feeling open. What I’m doing now is not necessarily a series. That’s the openness, I guess. I’m trying to figure out if there’s a theme like a life cycle—but that’s not where I started, I’m not imposing that. Maybe in a way it’s less conceptual and it’s more going back to how I worked in the *Icons*

period.” She says this with a trace of hesitancy, then laughs. “I’ll just keep using the word *open* because I feel like I need oxygen!”

Looking at the work on the wall, Vevers appears happy to be less directive and let the work fall into a broad range that includes the lioness character, lobsters, anthropomorphic work, a filleted mermaid, and a newly reworked painting of a figure lying on a banana-yellow inflatable holding a limp hose with a few drops of water squeaking out. “In my mind, I’m thinking about drought and California,” she says. “Fantasizing about rain!”

The environment continues to be on the forefront of Vevers’s agenda as it was for her *Eden* paintings: “The environmental concerns are still pretty big. I listen to NPR in my studio, and a lot of the issues that we’re dealing with these days come up and percolate in my work. I can tell a personal story, whether it’s literally my own story or not, and it can still be a larger narrative. Personal ecology and environmental ecology are not that different. We live, we die, we evolve, we all need water, eventually we become earth.”

One new painting in rudimentary stages shows a thin young figure balancing on a tightrope in front of a Tantric oval of shimmering white gold. “That shape is symbolic of light and yoga. When I first discovered yoga at thirteen, it was a really important thing for me,” Vevers explains, adding that this was a means of attaining a measure of balance and calm. “Once I sketched it out and added gold leaf and really saw the shape, it reminded me of Myron Stout and his work perfecting iconic shapes—so simple, so reductive.”

Stout was a close family friend and these new paintings, with their meticulous reductiveness worked out over years, are a touchstone for Vevers: “It takes me back to that time. It’s not what’s going to get the viewer to that image, they’ll bring their own story, but it’s important to me to imbue the image with a lot of meaningful material or background.” This new work marks a return to Tantric imagery but in a more abstract way. “The form, that particular cosmic egg, has really intrigued me since my teens because it’s like the sun or the moon, but it’s not—and it’s like an egg, but it’s not. I look at a lot of that imagery.”

Her latest body of work, the *Shiva* series, features the lobster as Shiva, one of the three major deities of Hinduism. Shiva is vast, limitless, and transcendent, with as many forms that are fearsome as benevolent, one of which is the patron god of yoga and the arts. “Shiva is known as the god of destruction,” she explains, “but he is also seen as a god of creation, symbolized by the fertile lingam.”



Shiva: While We Dance, 2010, oil and gold leaf on Mylar, 11.5 by 9.5 inches COLLECTION OF KIM MANOCHERIAN



The Afterlife, 2016, oil and gold leaf on Mylar, 9.125 x 12.125 inches COURTESY OF ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY

An erotically charged image of intimacy with a lobster reaches a kind of fever pitch in *While We Dance*, 2010, but then sex and sexuality, sensuality, and coupling have been a sustained note in her work since her early days.

"The sensuality comes from the same drive that permeates so much of my work," she says, "to portray a woman's body from a woman's perspective, as a participant in desire rather than an object of desire, and to portray the passion, power, complexity, and humor that

exist between the sexes. In the *Shiva* paintings, for example, the lobster is at once sexy, with all of its multiple limbs, and a little dangerous and aloof, with its armor-like exoskeleton, but also kind of ridiculous because the scale is so physically impossible. Again, I think many of my paintings over the last decade are not only about our relationships with each other, but also about our relationship with the planet. In *While We Dance*, dancing with Shiva is like playing with fire—passionate, yes, but also like a searing forest fire clearing space for something new to grow. While we dance about in our lives, the climate is warming—it remains to be seen what will evolve in the space we leave behind."

The Art of Survival, 2010–11, neatly updates the imagery from Vevers's *Secular Icons* days, complete with an anchor, and a lobster around the shoulders replacing the thick fish of the original. The work in progress on her studio wall, provisionally entitled *Vortex*, has a woman locked in an ambiguous tug-of-war with a crustacean while spiraling waters close in around her. "She's caught in this whirlpool—of embracing, retreating, there's a push-pull, back-and-forth."

The painting of an empty boat, notable for its lack of figures, which I noticed in her Wellfleet

studio back in the fall, is here, still unfinished, trying to declare itself. Vevers thought it was done but it kept "yapping" at her. Time is a key component of her process, much of it spent looking, considering, meditating on the "rightness" of the painting—is it saying what she wants it to say? "I think a piece is probably done when it stops asking me for anything," she says. "There's a kind of wholeness, when I can look at it and not see something I want to change. Again, it's not a decision—all of a sudden it's done."

The Afterlife is the name of the boat painting, which Vevers began a couple of years ago. "When our dog, Lucy, died, I almost added her into the boat," she explains, "but then I realized it carried more power without her. There's this idea of the boat just drifting off into the afterlife. . . . But the whole painting is about dealing with death, the presence of absence, so it seemed important that the boat was empty. In other words, the figure is actively absent from the painting."

Birth, life, and death. The cycle of life. Vevers is at that point in life when she's "looking forward, and looking back at the same time," notably aware of the past as the future continues to shrink. In the meantime, there's work to be done. She's doing other sketches without the figure, working with a softer palette, and using the simplified forms of the Tantric egg and mandalas that hark back to her earliest paintings. She talks about doing a series of animal eye portraits—a painting of the eye of Rauschenberg's goat hangs on her living room wall—and expanding the palette of her lobster paintings: "Shiva is blue. One of the things I still want to do is a blue lobster."

Looking at the curved slats of the boat in *The Afterlife*, Vevers mentions the one she built of similar design, and the sensation of rowing it: "When I was doing the boat piece, I was thinking about that feeling. There's a confidence—you're gliding along, moving forward, but you're not facing where you're going. You look every once in a while, but you have to have a certain amount of trust. You're not really studying what you're leaving, and yet you have this whole awareness of it because that's where you're facing. That's where I feel I am right now, that place. I have the oars, but I don't have the boat!" 🦞

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TABITHA VEVERS'S WORK CAN BE SEEN LOCALLY AT THE ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY IN PROVINCETOWN.



Lioness: Quieting the Night, 2010, oil and gold leaf on ivory, 10.75 by 8.25 inches COURTESY OF ALBERT MEROLA GALLERY

All That Glitters

A CONVERSATION WITH JOAN SNYDER

By Jan Lhormer

I HAD THE GOOD fortune to visit with painter Joan Snyder in her Brooklyn studio in January. She greeted me in paint-splattered clothes as we made our introductions and continued into her living room, where some of her historic paintings, prints, and drawings sparkled. We then proceeded out the back door and through the backyard, past a small fishpond, and into her studio. A renovated carriage house held ample work space and various tables ordered with jars, bottles, tubes, cans, brushes, and other tools for art-making. Several skylights diffused cool light over a series of freshly painted canvases. The new pieces conveyed her signature iconography: luscious fields of color, heavy impasto contrasted by areas of bare canvas, gestural brushstrokes bleeding drips of paint, and embedded mixed media. Various combinations of glitter, silk, dried flowers, earth, burlap, and more were layered beneath a medley of acrylic paints, gel mediums, oil paint, and oil sticks, and spoke in chorus along the studio walls.



Lady, 2015, oil, acrylic, and dried flowers on canvas, 54 by 76 inches

PHOTO BY FIONN REILLY

Many of these paintings were destined to travel to the newly opened Parrasch Heijnen gallery in Los Angeles, which is featuring her work in a solo exhibition that opened on April 30. I asked Snyder if there's a certain point when she knows a painting is finished. "There are so many points when one of my paintings could be finished. It is often a tough decision," she explained, but she added that she values input from a few close people in her life: her partner of many years, her daughter, and an "extraordinary studio assistant" who has soon to forego working for Snyder to keep up with the demands of her own painting career. In this current body of work, surfaces are less built up, compositions feel more spontaneous or informal, and the color palette is relatively subdued and earthy . . . like a shift in seasons, or a variation on a favorite recipe.

At the same time, Snyder's pictorial language continues to combine elements of abstraction with autobiographical figurative and symbolic imagery. While her style is comparable to that of painters such as Anselm Kiefer or Robert Rauschenberg and their use of innovative materials and expressive surfaces, her content is more intimate and experiential—the palette is just plain prettier. She has mastered an elixir of sophisticated craft to tell her stories through musical references and rhythms of colors, visceral organic and synthetic means, and perfunctory inserts of automatic writing. Her practice is firmly rooted in the formal history and language of paint, yet catapults into the wild world of feeling.

A self-proclaimed "maximalist," Snyder states that music fuels much of her inspiration, and cites composers such as Bach, Arvo Pärt, Nina Simone, Laurie Anderson, and Philip Glass as just a few of the formative influences for her rich and tactile paintings. Lately, Snyder has been listening to Anderson's experimental work, which combines rhythmic sound, performance, and emotional narrative, drawing parallels to Snyder's operatic paintings. She cites classical music as closely aligned to her process of choreographing composition. At times, a grid, like a musical staff, functions as an underlying structure on which to build up forms and relationships. In preliminary drawing studies, Snyder combines diary-like sketches and writing to unearth themes that may precede a painting by two to three years—she often attends concerts, sketchbook in hand. Classical novels provide additional inspiration and Snyder maintains they are not as difficult to read as people assume. She enjoys reading the works of authors such as Tolstoy, George Eliot, Flaubert, and Proust, discussing their work at a book club in Woodstock, New York, where she and her partner have a second home.

Snyder adheres to a rigorous painting routine, which begins early with intensive mornings in the studio. Music unlocks creative doors, which she explains are rarely blocked. "One thing leads to another," she states succinctly, as is evidenced by a legacy of paintings that have evolved through five decades.

Snyder has been making prints since the mid-'60s. In her typical exuberant style, she layers various print processes, such as lithography, etching, and woodblock, and often adds hand painting, pastel, and glitter. These techniques were on display in a retrospective exhibition at the Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, titled *Dancing with the Dark: Prints by Joan Snyder, 1963–2010*. This show, which ran from 2011 to 2012, showcased the artist's experimental techniques, exploring in bold color themes of nature, intimacy, love, and violence. The comprehensive collection traveled to the Boston University Art Gallery, the University of Richmond Museums, and the University of New Mexico Art Museum.

Joan Snyder graduated from the Rutgers University MFA program in 1966 and received almost immediate attention in the art world with a 1970 solo show in New York City of her signature stroke paintings. She has sustained a forceful presence ever since. While the '60s and '70s were dominated by art with a cool Minimalist, geometric style, Snyder's work embraced qualities from German Expressionism infused with personal narrative and symbolism.

As Pop and Minimalist movements defined the continuation of a male-dominated art world in the mid-'70s, Snyder, along with other women, was making art that was autobiographical, political, visceral, and overflowing with experimental materials. She explains in *Joan Snyder* (Abrams, 2005), in an essay written by Hayden Herrera, that the style, originally dismissed as feminist art (then a dirty word), was appropriated



Winter Rose, 2013, oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, pastel, and glitter on linen, 64 by 30 inches

by male artists and came to be known as Neo-Expressionism, the defining style of the 1980s.

Snyder continues to explore and develop her virtuoso vocabulary, focusing on all things Mother Nature: images of fields, flowers, ponds, and themes of passion, death, grief, birth, and renewal cycle throughout her work. During our interview, she discussed a new canvas titled *Lady*: "The figure appeared magically and mysteriously and I let her be. This is as surprising to me as it might be to you—I've had figures in my paintings on and off over the years but not often at the bottom and in the midst of a serene field painting. There's a magic about *Lady* for me—the layers, the full palette over the serene field, and then the figurative elements, appearing in different areas of the painting."

This foray into a new series of paintings follows a recent body of work called *Sub Rosa*, which involved three to four years of profound and heartfelt engagement using the rose as "the main event." Snyder wrote a passionate essay for the catalogue to that show, which opened last May at Manhattan's Franklin Parrasch Gallery. The essay explains that the

title, *Sub Rosa*, refers to an ancient Roman code of secrecy, in which a rose painted on the ceiling of a banquet hall signaled that confidentiality be the rule for all things discussed behind the closed doors—and for all truths revealed under the influence of wine.

The *Sub Rosa* exhibition included a work titled *Winter Rose*, which displays all of the romantic power Snyder can deliver. It's a piece with great visual impact: the six-foot vertical image holds a looming, swirling rose built in relief out of papier-mâché and paint in purples, merlot accents, and echoes of blues sprinkled with glitter. The rose swells and hovers above what resembles a field of snow painted with white strokes of paint, revealing layers of pale, frozen earth. Near the bottom, a circular pool of deep, blood-like burgundy is entombed in a gel medium and framed by a few gestural dashes of violet. Starkly beautiful, the image suggests a burial, or a struggle between opposites.

Snyder writes about her creative process as being fraught with obsession, pain, and pleasure. She speaks of grief, rage, and mourning, without disclosing any details into any specific tragedy or event. The act of making the work seems to be cathartic for her, or at least transformative. She observes that “in the end they are about paint and material, about decades of personal iconography, about . . . rhythm and timing and color and form . . . and style . . . and not about loss.”

If *Winter Rose* is about death and mourning, then *Amor Matris* signifies a renewal, and the “hallelujah” that Snyder acknowledges in her essay. The title translates as both “the love for a mother” and “the love of a mother,” taken from a note the artist made to herself while reading *Ulysses*. Dashes of soft pinks, yellows, golds, and grays recall Monet's pastoral water lilies, yet the piece also harnesses Snyder's intensity



Wild Roses, 2009, lithograph, etching, and woodcut on paper, edition of thirty, 28.5 by 38.5 inches

PHOTO BY BRYAN WHITNEY

through built-up surfaces, layered mediums, and confessional scribbles: “If not, know that I have loved you very much.”

Symphony VII showcases her ability to build theatrics into large-scale canvases. Five roses encased in silky squares crescendo into dramatic color, underlined by strokes of white paint. There is a tension between the formal structure of the cubes and the unrestrained swaths below, where berries and dried sunflowers swim in resin. The palette and surfaces are undeniably beautiful, yet breathe with a moody sadness.

In a testament to her originality, long-standing influence, and success, Snyder was awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 2007, also known as the genius award. Delighted by

this honor, she acknowledges that although the award offers great affirmation for the tremendous efforts she has put forth, it has not specifically altered the course of her working life or career. Other prestigious awards she's received include a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1974, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 1983, and, most recently, an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters to honor “artists of exceptional accomplishment.”

Over the years, Snyder has held teaching positions at various universities and colleges throughout the country. More recently, her educational activities include short-term workshops or speaking engagements. Cherie Mittenenthal,



Symphony VII, 2014, oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, pastel, silk, berries, and dried sunflowers on linen, in two parts, 54 by 18.25 inches



Amor Matris, 2015, oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, paper, etching fragments, rosebuds, twigs, and glitter on canvas, 66 by 84.5 inches

director of the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, invited Snyder to be part of the center's teaching roster nine years ago, and the relationship continues to this day, with a weeklong master workshop and a two-person exhibition scheduled for this fall. Her work will also be featured in several group shows in 2016: *The Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts* at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York; *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*, the Met Breuer, New York; and *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Brandhorst Museum, Munich, which traveled to Mumok in Vienna.

In the mid-1970s, much of Snyder's work contained strong feminist imagery aligning

itself with the women's art movement of the time. Since then, she has defied all labels and considers her work to speak a universal rather than a political language. Paying homage to the earth and the heart, her voice has remained relevant and contemporary throughout changes in art world trends and advancing technology. Raw and authentic, eloquent and true, she challenges us to confront our demons yet indulge in the glitter.

In her *Sub Rosa* catalogue essay, Snyder speaks of requiems—Catholic Masses for the repose of the dead—and the “profound sadness of the Kaddish,” the Jewish prayer associated with the mourning of the dead. In her

master's thesis in the mid-1960s, Snyder wrote that painting offers her an altar where she practices her religion. That hasn't changed. Aligned with values of the ancient Great Goddess, who embodies all of the bounty of the earth, her studio ritual celebrates the regenerative potency of nature and offers the world an antidote for darkness. ▀

JAN LHORMER is a painter, art professor, and arts writer living in Falmouth, Massachusetts. Her large canvases combine abstraction with landscape imagery and have been exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the region. For more information, go to www.janlhormer.com.

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NEW YORK NIGHT | CAPE LIGHT

"Times Square, New York" 1942
18 x 42 inches: oil on canvas

"Ocean Flats" 1952
13.5 x 30 inches: gouache on board

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Joerg Dressler

A STILL POINT IN THE MAELSTROM

By Christopher Busa

BORN IN GERMANY, in the town that was the birthplace of the Brothers Grimm, Joerg Dressler encountered the formative moments that animate the paintings he does today. In 1996, he moved to Boston, earning his living as a graphic designer. A few years later, Alden Gallery was formed in Provincetown by Stephen Syta and Howard Karren, and Dressler has been showing there ever since. He works in series that generally involve a dramatic episode in nature. Storms are an important theme, as well as icebergs, steep cliffs, mountains, massive ocean waves, and other oscillations in nature. He seldom does portraits of people, but evokes sublime depictions of our confrontation with nature, especially the contrary effects of nature on the human psyche. He places tranquility side by side with violence, light clashing with the dark, fragility beside boldness—surprising forces seemingly summoned on a whim, with involuntary energy. His current series of paintings depicts entropy in its divergent manifestations, low entropy being a very ordered state and high entropy a very chaotic state. Nature, willy-nilly, demonstrates lessons to its observers.



Entropy High XV, 2015, oil on canvas, 72 by 48 inches

Dressler grew up in a small house in the countryside, and he often joined his parents going hunting: “That was my first experience in nature. There was a stream going right through the yard of our house. In the summer, we fished and played in it. In the spring, high waters came, and it was daunting and dangerous, rough and fast. When I was four or five, I fell into it and almost drowned. My sister saved me. Here, for the first time, I saw that nature could have two sides, opposite sides. Because I had experienced the stream in the summertime, I knew there was a rock in the middle, which we used to step on in order to cross the water. Even though my head was underwater, I grabbed on to the rock because it was familiar. I can’t seem to remember being frightened, which is weird—I should have been frightened. Maybe I had the trust that something would save me. It is a memory that has stuck in my head forever.”

I am reminded of a story by Edgar Allan Poe titled “A Descent into the Maelstrom,” concerning a mile-wide ocean whirlpool that swallows ships or anything caught in its vortex. A survivor is saved by holding on to pieces of debris, finding a still point in a spinning world. This reminds me of the young Dressler and his summer stepping-stone, a memory for Dressler that seems to have become a deep image he can go back to and mine, again and again, renewing the source, resulting in the artist’s belated magnification of an early trauma into large-scale depictions of natural catastrophes. It is significant perhaps that, amid bobo, Dressler felt security; the power of the moment also triggered an immense sense of beauty.

Dressler received a master’s degree in visual communication from the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach in 1994. I asked him to define this topic, and he explained that the focus of a degree in visual communication is equally divided between theory and practice, embodying multiple art forms, from fine arts and graphic design to film and theater. He began his studies in fine arts, and then gravitated to graphic design with a special interest in typography and illustration, spending a guest semester in Paris at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs.

Typography is the art of examining letter forms as visual shapes that possess sculptural qualities. When Picasso sat in the classroom as a boy, he confused the number seven with

an upside-down nose and saw the number two as a woman kneeling. Contemporary artists, from Stuart Davis to Jasper Johns, treat lettering less as legible signs, and more as shapes. Dressler and I spoke in his studio about dyslexic people who can't distinguish a *b* from a *d*, and he mentioned that he, too, was somewhat dyslexic, which caused him to become a slow reader—he is a visual person who learns by looking. He was able to understand the stories in comic books by following the pictures rather than the captions. It's curious that, as a graphic designer, he focuses on layouts and words, making the words illustrate the meaning through type. I asked him if he would agree that a graphic designer wants to signal visually what content is being presented.

"Yes," Dressler said, "and you want it to be functional, which necessitates a lot of focused detail to grab attention in a glance."

Dressler, working in groups of related works, has developed five series to date: *Still*, *Ninth Wave*, *Outlook*, *Fractals*, and the one we mentioned that concentrates on the concept of *entropy*. Works in each series exhibit a self-similarity. I notice that he uses two kinds of brushstrokes: one made with a wide brush, in which large areas can be covered with a smeared, streaky look; the other made with a very tiny brush that he can use to delineate lines with directional forces—thrusts of energy going in precise directions. These two brushstrokes are combined and related with divergent purposes. I asked if he could discuss these brushes and his unique use of them.

"Years ago, for a long time, I used only a palette knife, though I did use it like a brush, sitting relatively loosely and fluidly in my hand. I still use the palette knife for underpainting or for certain areas, but now there is much more brushwork. I like the idea of contrast in general. When it comes to typography, when it comes to paintings, I like juxtapositions that go back to extremes in nature, from calm to storms. The two different ways of using brushes allow my mark-making to create the contrasts I want."

His vistas offer a sense of volume, a sense of deep depth, and an interplay between the distant and the very close. I wondered about that sense of volume, in which Dressler uses the palette knife to create relief-like effects that approach the sculptural.

"The sense of volume has come out in more recent work," he explained. "For me, there is always a fine line between representation and abstract—at the moment, it is more representational than it used to be. The palette knife work was more abstract; I was using thicker paint and therefore building volume with that. Anything created, I find, is a way of building layers on top of each other."

I saw one of Dressler's paintings from the *Entropy* series, *Entropy High XV*, under the illumination of studio lights. There were streaks of lightning-like flashes shining in massive, towering clouds. It struck me as radiant, almost uncanny, as if there were actually a light behind the canvas that was glowing like sunlight through dark clouds, illuminating the backside and undersides. He had mentioned that he used silver paint, which is refractive. When he turned the lights off, suddenly the streaks disappeared.

Dressler began using silver nail polish in his work about four years ago, intrigued by how, depending on how the light hit the paper, there was a change in intensity. The *Entropy* series, especially the high-entropy works that are essentially clouds, offered a way to use the effect. It seems to work well with inflections and highlights, what he calls "drawing into the painting" on top of the painterly surface.

Clouds, being light enough to be moved by wind, are inherently unstable, and instability is the essence of entropy. In his groundbreaking book on the psychology of the creative eye, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order*, Rudolf Arnheim summons the second law of thermodynamics to explore how, if art is about harmony, the natural inclination toward disorder can contribute to balancing tension.

Dressler said, "The *Entropy* series started when I was thinking of giving up my career in graphic design and focusing on painting full-time. I was on a four-day week schedule, working collaboratively with other people—quite a different structure than a studio practice, which is largely self-motivated and somewhat isolating. Here, I was presented with the idea of disorder, which came out in my paintings. I was again confronted with the fine line between structure and freedom."



Entropy High XXV, 2015, oil on canvas, 18 by 14 inches



Entropy Low VII, 2015, acrylic and oil on board, 12 by 12 inches

One of the fundamental concepts in graphic design is the grid, which is a matrix of organization, dividing areas with a sense of proportion that establishes a sense of rhythm over multiple pages, with patterns repeated, yet pleasingly varied. The grid lends itself to a lot of mathematical interpretations—the rule of thirds, the choice of columns per page, and how to use photographs that can break the grid and add excitement, drama, and intrusion. The grid, being structured, is low entropy. An inert block of ice is low entropy. The higher the entropy, the higher the energy, the higher the temperature, the higher the disorder. Dressler uses an example of a full deck of new cards, ordered by suits and rank. But if you drop the

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deck on the floor, scattering the sequence, you create a condition of high entropy.

We often apply concepts such as beauty, harmony, radiance, and unity to an aesthetic experience; entropy, however, is something I have never considered to be part of that realm. Where does beauty operate in either low or high entropy? Where does harmony exist in either state? Harmony refers to the organization of parts to the whole. If we have a very complex, high-entropy, and almost chaotic structure, there nevertheless needs to be some kind of harmonious order to call it a work of art.

"That was the tricky part with the high-entropy pieces," Dressler said. "The tendency is to identify certain forms you can repeat. That was exactly what I felt I had to avoid. In achieving the disorder I wanted, I tried to show flow and movement without echoing certain forms."

This brings up Dressler's earlier focus on fractals, in which the whole is replicated in its smallest parts. One can explore infinite detail and retain the same scale. Which begs the question, can we even say whether fractals possess high or low entropy? The smallest part has the same proportion as the largest part. William Blake saw the universe in a grain of sand, and atoms are micro solar systems.

"I do want my paintings to be somewhat in between representational and abstract," Dressler explained. "The isometric cubes in the background have a structure, similar to a snowflake or a piece of ice, that is very organized in a clear, repetitive order in its smallest elements. The iceberg on top of it is more of a free form, more organic, with the iceberg decaying, essentially melting."

I asked Dressler if this process was scary for him.

"Yes, and while there is an element of 'angst,' I like to think of my work as having a positive component because it is about duality. This has a backstory: about two years ago, I started to bring my drawing into my paintings, using a very fine brush. This specific piece [*Entropy High XXV*] is actually an overlay of a plant that is growing on top of the cloud scenery in the background. A botanical overlay. Initially, it didn't make sense, but I was driven by an impulse. The end result surprised me. I had thought it would look simply overlaid, but I was fascinated to see that it integrated. The overlay, done in silver, reflective paint, can be hit by the light from different angles, depending on where you are standing, so that either the background comes visually to the foreground—meaning the clouds are more visible—or, from another point of view, the silver overlay drawing jumps into the foreground. I didn't plan on it, but once I saw what was happening, I went with it." ▢

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is founder and editorial director of Provincetown Arts Press.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH Christina Schlesinger

PAINTING WHAT I SEE

By Hunter O'Hanian

AS I WRAPPED UP A BOOK LAUNCH at the Leslie-Lohman Museum in 2014, Christina Schlesinger reintroduced herself. We had met several years earlier at a reading at the Fine Arts Work Center. I learned that she was living in New York and was maintaining an active studio practice, and asked if I could make a studio visit. She readily agreed. There, I saw a deep and diverse body of work, with unusual frankness and insight addressing her inner self, including images that explored the female form, pleasure, and flannel shirts. This profoundly personal work was created by someone who had a front-row seat at the Kennedy White House; lived in a 1960s commune in Venice, California; became a Guerrilla Girl; and fought back from life-threatening cancer more than once. It was refreshingly honest, cliché-proof work addressing a lesbian/feminist sensibility that I had seldom seen.

In the gay art world, there is no shortage of male art-makers who use the human form to express their otherness. Some have made a profound difference, while others have simply reworked well-worn ideas. However, women have seldom gone there. Whether it's a response to centuries of patriarchy, or reflects the possibility that the genders are truly wired differently, women have not chosen to represent themselves the way men have. However, like Romaine Brooks, Ruth Bernhard, and Tee Corrine before her, Christina has addressed her otherness head-on, fearless in the face of claims of objectification. She epitomizes what it means to be a gay artist today.

HUNTER O'HANIAN: Great to chat with you, Christina. Tell us a little about your background.

CHRISTINA SCHLESINGER: I grew up in Cambridge—the middle child of a Harvard family. My father and both grandfathers taught at Harvard. My grandmother Cannon was in the same Radcliffe class as Gertrude Stein and was a student of William James. My antecedents were all hardy, bright, unworldly midwesterners who reached Harvard on their intellectual merit and stayed, becoming rooted to the institution.

HO: In fact, there is a library at Harvard that bears your family name.

CS: The Schlesinger Library for Women was named for my grandmother and grandfather Schlesinger. Going to Radcliffe was a given for me. I had little choice in the decision, I think.

HO: And you have an artistic legacy as well.

CS: My great-grandfather Frances Haynes was an itinerant portrait painter, traveling across New England in the mid-nineteenth century painting prosperous Yankee businessmen and immortalizing their young children, often victims of tuberculosis. He contracted TB while painting one such child and died. We have found examples of his work in the New Hamp-

(above) Schlesinger at work on her recent *Justice Mural* with high-school students on Long Island, 2016



Photograph of president-elect John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., taken in Cambridge, MA, when JFK set up headquarters at the Schlesinger house and met with several Harvard professors whom he appointed to jobs in his administration, 1960

shire Historical Society and the Currier Museum of Art. The paintings are beautiful: smoothly painted, optimistic. My mother always painted and had a studio in whatever house we had.

HO: *What was it like growing up in Cambridge in the 1960s?*

CS: To be honest, it was rather provincial. I went to a private school. Things changed in 1961, when I was thirteen and my father became special assistant to President Kennedy and the entire family moved to Washington.

HO: *How was that experience?*

CS: It yanked my young mind wide open! It was definitely a Southern city back then. I had never been in a place with so many African-Americans. We had an African-American maid, Sarah, who served us dinner at night. A limousine waited outside our Georgetown townhouse in the mornings to take my father to the White House. Jackie Kennedy, Caroline, and the Secret Service came to our house to trick-or-treat. I went to the White House with my dad for lunch and ran into JFK wandering in the halls.

HO: *So you began your teenage years in Washington.*

CS: Yes. I went to the Madeira school in McLean, Virginia. I had to say "Yes, ma'am" to my teachers. We wore uniforms and the girls came to class in jodhpurs so they could ride their own horses in the afternoon. I had crushes on girls at school, but in one sense it was okay because every "new girl" was supposed to have an "old girl" to bond with. But I had more serious crushes on the girls in jodhpurs.

My mother became well known among the "New Frontier wives" as a portrait painter, and she painted the children of Newt Minow, William vanden Heuvel, Jean Kennedy Smith, and Walter Lippmann. She was going through a painful time with my father—my smart, charming, charismatic, flirtatious father—but they were having such a grand and glorious time during the Kennedy era, the pain and disappointment of their marriage was swept under the gaitie.

My parents seemed to go out every night, and the nights they didn't, there would be parties at our house. I would come downstairs and might run into Bobby Kennedy, or the Kingston Trio, or Marlene Dietrich. Almost as soon as Kennedy was assassinated, my parents' marriage came apart; by the time I was in college, their marriage had completely collapsed.

HO: *Who were your influences growing up?*

CS: Looking back, I realize I had a great deal of support from my grandmothers. My grandmother Cannon told me to always sit next to the

strange-looking ones in class since they were the most interesting, and my grandmother Schlesinger encouraged me to live in California in my twenties. She told me Cambridge was not a place for me. I always wanted to take a dare; I always wanted to be an artist; I always wanted to run, jump, swim; I spent a lot of time trying not to be controlled by anyone. More and more, I see my grandmothers as role models; both were suffragettes, they both struggled, and mostly succeeded, to live independent lives as writers and adventurers.

HO: *I understand that your family has been coming to the Cape for many years.*

CS: Growing up, we spent half of every summer in Franklin, New Hampshire, on a hill surrounded by my mother's family, and the other half in Wellfleet, which my father loved because of his love of the ocean. It also fed his friendships with Ed O'Connor, Edmund Wilson, Mary McCarthy, Dwight and Nancy Macdonald, Dan Aaron, Alfred Kazin, E. J. Kahn, Gilbert Seldes—there were so many literary types then, and the same sort of partying that when on in Washington continued on the Cape. We kids just loved the beach and the hours spent bodysurfing in the ocean and swimming in Slough Pond. I saw my first lesbians in Provincetown and was electrified and fascinated.

HO: *What was it like when you moved to Venice Beach in the early '70s?*

CS: It was a wonderful time. It was just the beginning of feminism. It was a great time to come out, and Venice was a great place to come out. There were wild dykes in the Venice Canals and on the Venice Boardwalk. It was fun.

My career as an artist took a wonderful, serendipitous turn as a result of my early adventures as a lesbian. I was drawn to a shady lesbian bar on shabby West Washington Boulevard, which is now the fabulously chic Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice. There, over the pool table, I was introduced to Judy Baca, who was organizing artists to paint the "History of Venice" murals for the Venice Pavilion on Venice Beach. It began a friendship that endures to this day. I helped her recruit a dozen artists to paint the Venice murals. Then we cofounded SPARC, the Social and Public Art Resource Center, for which both of us have been recognized and honored by the city of Los Angeles. Over the years, I painted numerous murals for SPARC and organized dozens of others, working with communities to select artists and find walls. In 1991, I painted *Chagall Comes to Venice Beach*, a block-and-a-half-long mural that has been declared one of the "iconic murals" of Los Angeles and is permanently protected.



Christina Schlesinger and her father, Arthur, on the deck of the family house in Wellfleet on Slough Pond, 1962



"The title of the original mural painted in 1991 was Chagall Comes to Venice Beach. In 1994, the Northridge earthquake damaged the wall to such an extent that they had to sandblast the mural off the wall. I received a call in NYC that winter telling me they had to remove the mural but they 'would get me back to paint it again.' I thought—no way. But people really missed the mural, petitions circulated, the Jewish Federation and SPARC raised the money, and so, in the summer of 1996, I went back to Venice to repaint it. The magic happened again—original crew members showed up; Bill, the homeless painter of angels, reappeared; and Dougo, a homeless aged surfer, walked up and added a whole new section depicting the Pacific Ocean Park Pier, which he pointed out had been right in front of where the mural was located and was a popular amusement park and surfing site. This 1996 version of the mural is called Chagall Returns to Venice Beach." — Christina Schlesinger

HO: You came back East after about a decade?

CS: After a major relationship ended, I left California. I had finally come out to my parents, and they had not accepted the news well. My mother was worried I would have a sad and lonely life, and my father quoted Emerson to me over a lunch at the Century Club in New York, but neither felt comfortable with the subject of my sexuality. But I loved them both—in particular, my dad—so I never felt comfortable discussing my sexuality with either of them.

Looking back, I realize that I had to go to Venice, California, three thousand miles from the East Coast, to come out. After eleven years away, I came back a lesbian and an artist, and while the lesbian part did not sit well with my family, the artist part did. I also felt ready to deal with my father's fame, which had overwhelmed me before, and I was curious to see what New York had to offer.

HO: Tell me about that transition, moving from the West Coast to New York.

CS: The artists I had known earlier from my time on the Cape had already established themselves in careers in New York by the time I returned from California. I had my murals; I had connections from the feminist community, and I soon met Nancy Fried, who had also been in Los Angeles at the Woman's Building and had moved to New York a year

earlier. It was with a sense of relief that I met her, someone who knew and understood both California and New York, and we soon became lovers. We have been together ever since, through various ups and downs. We have nursed each other through cancer, supported each other in our artistic endeavors, and, most importantly, brought up our beautiful daughter, Chun.

It took a long time for my family to recognize Nan as my partner. Now it is not a problem, but in the early years, I did not feel my family's full acceptance of our relationship. Sometimes it is hard to communicate to younger lesbians the alienation and isolation that many lesbians of my generation, and older generations, felt in those days.

HO: Tell me about your work.

CS: My painting is not conceptual. I did not set out to represent gender and sexuality in my work. My painting is based upon what I observe and how I interpret what I see—for example, I started as a landscape painter. With the paintings from the *Birch Forest* series, I transformed what I saw into what I felt, the birches becoming the torsos of women.

I also paint from memory and experience. The *Tomboy* series sprang from memories of myself as a tomboy, and later from my sexual experiences. For me, the difference in confronting gender norms lies in two areas: the objectification of women in society, the bland and homogenized view of women's beauty and sexuality as determined by media and a dominant white male culture, and the invisibility of women in general.

Despite some progress over the past decades, women simply are not in positions of power. In that sense, our gender "norms" are essentially male determined. Therefore, it is in our own interest as women to represent our gender norms as faithfully and truthfully as we can. While that was not a conscious choice on my part when I started the *Tomboy* series, it was an underlying principle. I started the series, as I do with most, by just picking up the brush and starting without exactly knowing where I was heading.

HO: What are your thoughts about objectification of the female form?

CS: I do not worry about objectifying the female form. The female form is my subject, and I am portraying the female form from my own female point of view. Can genitals be effectively depicted in art? In my own work, I have not really dealt with women's genitalia. I believe women's genitalia can be effectively depicted; mostly it has been done



Christina Schlesinger and Nancy Fried, 1990

PHOTO BY MARIANNA COOK



Jacks, 1994, mixed media on canvas, 20 by 16 inches

metaphorically with flower forms and abstractly in folded hidden forms. Men depict their genitalia constantly in every thrusting monument.

HO: Tell me a little about the role of women in the art world.

CS: Men and women are not treated the same in the art world. That is the point of the Guerrilla Girls and why I became one. Simply study our posters to know what was and still is going on. We started gathering statistics in the late '80s on the representation of women artists in galleries and museums, the number of women reviewed in newspapers and art magazines. The numbers are pathetically low. The situation for women has not changed significantly, although the issue has now become mainstream. Now, as a matter of course, people discuss and write about the number of women in a particular gallery or museum



Romaine Brooks and Me, 1994, mixed media on canvas, 26 by 33 inches

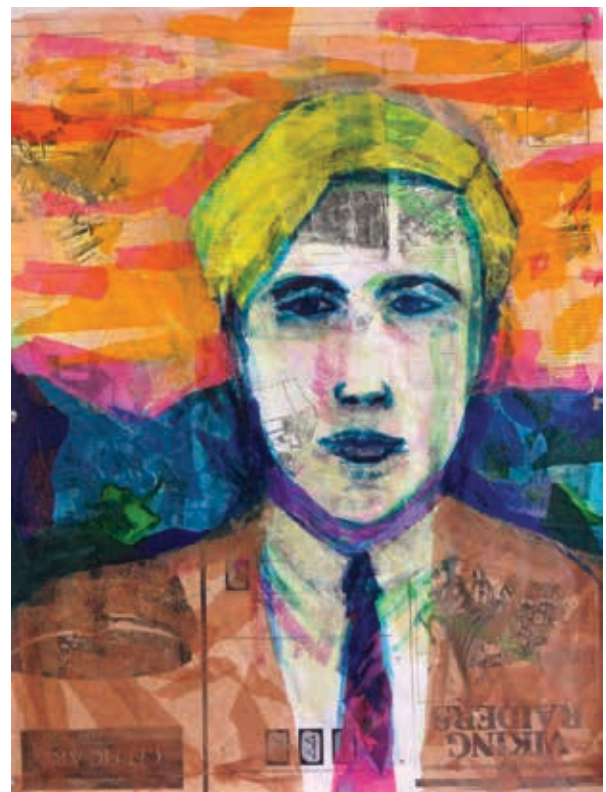
exhibition. However, all you have to do is look at the auctions to see how poorly women artists fare. Misogyny in the art world is rampant. Women artists who do well tend to be either young or very old. Women artists who have toiled in obscurity for decades are, in some cases, suddenly now doing well. A close friend in her seventies just had a show at Mary Boone Gallery; her success has come late, but fortunately she is still alive to enjoy it. Another woman friend, who has been in a Whitney Biennial and is a recipient of a MacArthur genius award, was dropped by her Chelsea gallery, being told that "the gallery could not sell the work of a middle-aged woman artist."

HO: Can artwork be gay? Is there a "lesbian sensibility"?

CS: I have been curious for some time about the notion of "lesbian sensibility," whether it exists or whether it is even important to consider. I reached out to a number of lesbian artist and writer friends to see what I would find. While there was no particular consensus, two themes emerged: the desire, the demand for visibility and validation, and the persistence of attitude. Lesbians are filled with attitude. The poet Mary Meriam said: "I love this woman, I know her, and she knows me, and I don't give a damn what anyone thinks of that." We want to be seen. We are here. We exist. See me. I am part of the story. Ariel Luna Anais, a wonderful artist, said: "Our experiences speak to us because they validate our existence and over time write our history. It's so natural to want to see a piece of your heart outside of yourself."

HO: You have spent a lot of time over the years in Provincetown and East Hampton in the summers. What is your sense of the art community in those areas now?

CS: It is expensive to live in Provincetown and East Hampton. Artists in these places are not young. Twenty years ago, I was more a part of the art world on the Cape, showing at the Cherry Stone Gallery in Wellfleet. Now I am not so involved. Artists find other artists wherever they go, and that has been true for me. I have artist friends and am a part of artist communities in Cape Cod, New York City, East Hampton, and Los Angeles. They really aren't that different from place to place. We show each other our work, show up for each other's openings, bewail the state of the art world, tell each other about great shows to see, exhibition opportunities, artist residencies. I have discovered as I've grown



Viking Raider, 2015, tissue paper, rag paper, acrylic paint, and matte medium on cloth, 34 by 26 inches

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Leo Castelli	0	0
Charles Cowles	3	1
Larry Gagosian	0	0
Gemini G.E.L.	2	1
Marion Goodman	2	0
Jay Gorney	2	0
Hirsch & Adler Modern	1	0
Kent	1	0
Knoedler	1	0
Koury Wingate	1	0
David McKee	1	0
Pace	3	1
Tony Shafrazi	0	1
Holly Solomon	3	1
Sperone Westwater	1	1
Stue	0	1

GUERRILLA GIRLS

Guerrilla Girls poster: *Bigoted Galleries*, 1990, 22 by 17 inches

older that I am more generous about sharing whatever access I have to opportunities and much more interested in advancing the careers and success of others. One regret I have is that I did not buy more art as I was going along.

HO: What are your thoughts about art in NYC today?

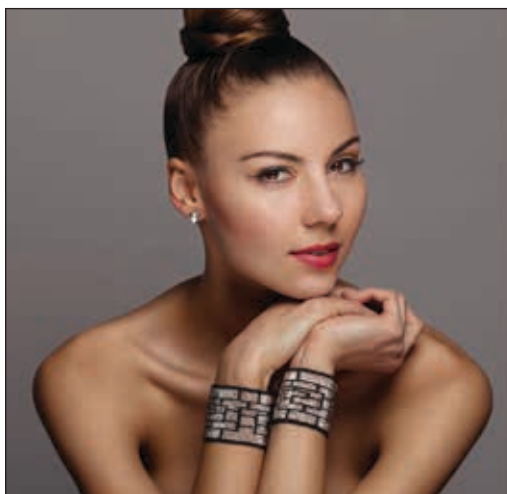
CS: I prefer going to the small galleries on the Lower East Side. They remind me of the East Village in the old days. I like the intimate spaces, and the work is generally more interesting than the corporate spaces of Chelsea. However, you can't help but go to Chelsea. The galleries there put on museum-quality shows: Morandi, Ad Reinhardt, Picasso. I pick and choose where I go. I recently saw Martin Wong's show at the Bronx Museum, which I loved. I knew him a bit, and it was great to get a chance to explore the range of his work. His work evoked feeling and a mood and the experience of a life fully lived as a Californian, second-generation Chinese, gay male artist who became enthralled with Loisa, firemen, and Latino convicts. I like all kinds of art. It just has to feel truthful. So much of the art I see in Chelsea feels shiny and expensive and leaves me feeling nothing. I always try to go see shows by women artists.

HO: You have been making work for nearly forty years. How has aging changed you?

CS: Aging and surviving cancer twice are transformative experiences. I was sick for nearly two years with stage four non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and learned how precious and fleeting life is. I had watched my sister die of ovarian cancer in her early sixties. I did not and do not want to waste any time. I have no tolerance for negativity and bullshit. I also have a legacy of tremendous longevity in my family. My father died at 90, intellect totally intact, and my mother is still articulate and energetic at 103, frustrated only by a weakening body. I also recently survived uterine cancer. I figure I could live a long life or die at any moment. So I try to live my life as fully and honestly and truthfully as I can. I tell people I love them all the time, because you never know if it will be the last time. I travel, read books, look at art, make art, write, embrace teaching, love my family, pet my pets, swim, walk, whatever, with abandon.

In some ways, I think I am a better painter. I was recently in California working on the restoration of my *Chagall Returns to Venice Beach* mural and enjoyed making improvements to the hands and faces, knowing I was better at it now. I am glad I did my mural painting when I was younger and stronger, and I am also glad I did a lot of printmaking and fine-brush egg tempera painting when I was younger, because my eyes tire more easily now. Yes, my career as an artist has nourished me. It has not always been easy, but I can't imagine not having lived my life as an artist. ☒

HUNTER O'HANIAN has lived in Provincetown for more than twenty years. He has led many renowned visual arts organizations, including the Fine Arts Work Center, the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, the MassArt Foundation, and the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. In July 2016, Hunter became the head of the College Art Association.



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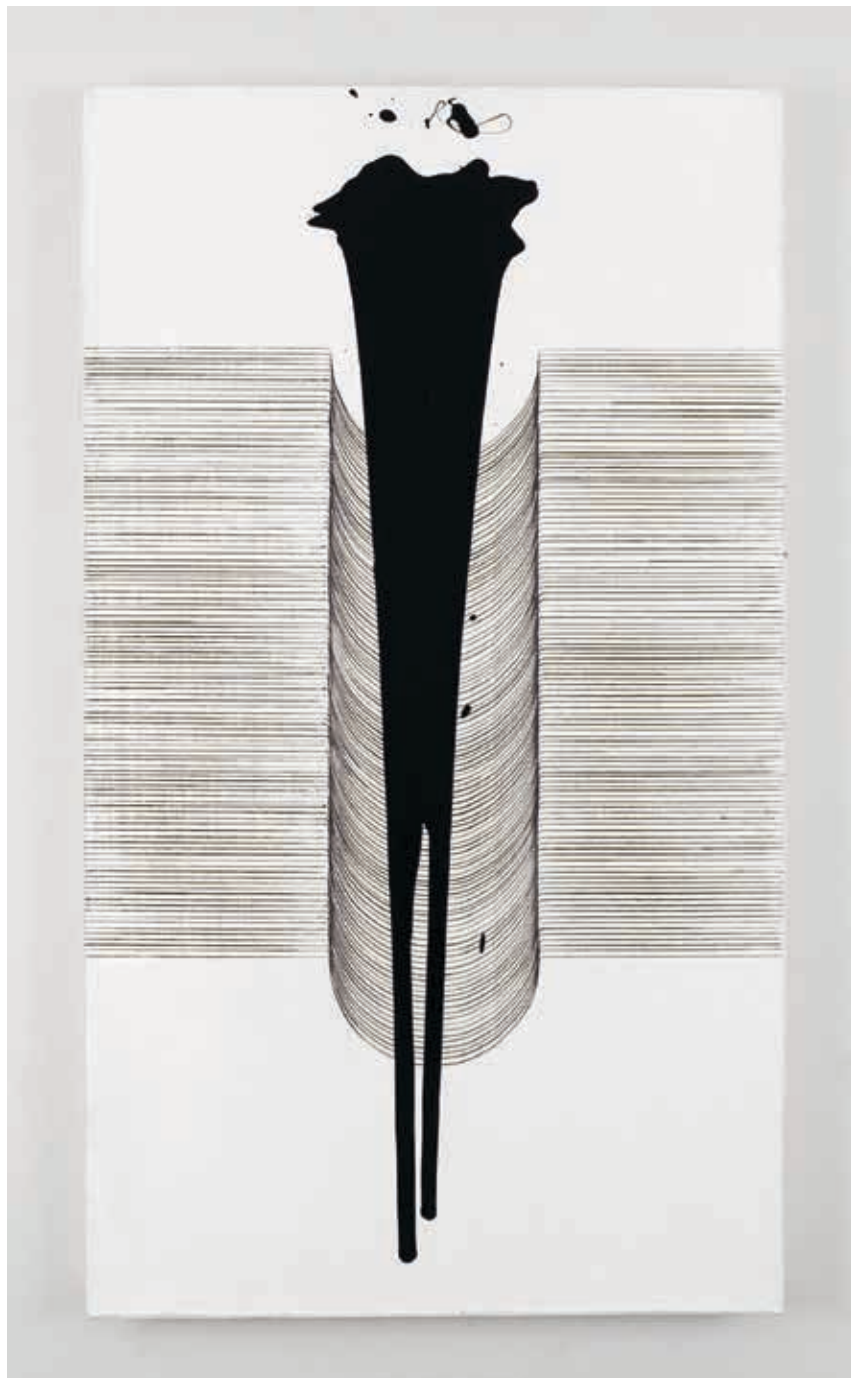
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Gary Kuehn

THE ART OF OPPOSING FORCES

By Cindy Hinant

GARY KUEHN WAS BORN in New Jersey in 1939 and lives and works in New York and Wellfleet. He is an artist best known for his emphasis on materials in his approach to sculpture and painting, and his works all have a physical quality resulting from the process of their production. They aren't simply painted or sculpted; rather, they are squeezed, poured, cut, or trapped within a conceptual framework. His work reflects binaries or opposing forces and expresses a tension between forms.



Niagara, 2014, graphite and acrylic/latex on canvas, 42 by 24 inches

PHOTO BY CINDY HINANT, NEW YORK

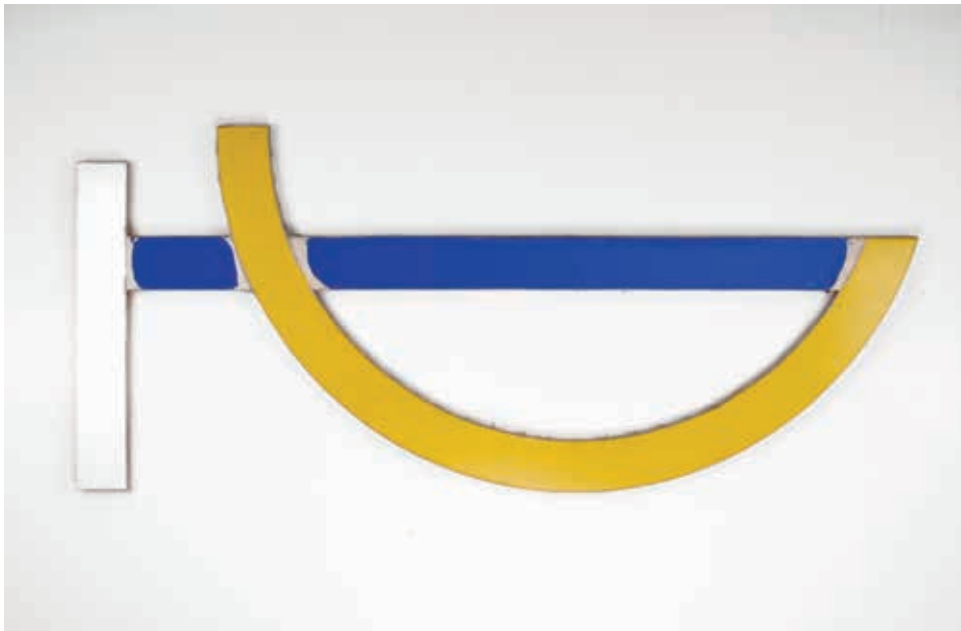
Kuehn has played a significant role in Process art and Postminimalism, having participated in the groundbreaking exhibitions *Eccentric Abstraction* in 1966, curated by Lucy Lippard, and *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969, curated by Harald Szeemann. His work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Hamburger Bahnhof, and the Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, among others.

A prolific artist, Kuehn has written very little about his own work. In 1965, when the Bianchini Gallery in New York published a catalogue for the group exhibition *Ten from Rutgers University*, Kuehn's artist statement was simply, "Gary Kuehn couldn't possibly write a statement about his work." The few statements he has published are often poetic and contradictory, much like his practice. Kuehn works intuitively, and knows that the rational mind is not always in sync with creative impulses, making it sometimes difficult to explain formal decisions. Recent events, however, have compelled Kuehn to begin processing the themes and ideas that have been present in his work since the 1960s. In 2013, the first comprehensive book of his work, *Gary Kuehn: Five Decades*, was published by Hatje Cantz, and in 2014, the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein staged the retrospective exhibition *Gary Kuehn: Between Sex and Geometry*: both events have allowed Kuehn to reflect on the breadth and focus of his long career.

Gary and I often have leisurely conversations about his work over coffee and cigars in his Chelsea loft, where he lives with his wife, the writer Suzanne McConnell. I have worked for nearly five years as his studio manager and archivist, and our new project is to record these conversations for his archive. This is the first published interview from these talks.

CINDY HINANT: *Tell me about how you got started.*

GARY KUEHN: I studied art history in college. I took a painting class but never thought seriously about art until I met George Segal, who was really important to me as a young artist. He treated me like a serious artist, and he invited me to look at exhibitions in New York with him, which gave me a pretty good sense of what was going on in the early '60s. In graduate school, it became clear to me that Abstract Expressionism and also more formal ways of working had run their course. There was the sense that it was up to us to push the



Berlin Series, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 36 by 74 inches COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

envelope. I didn't have much faith in prevailing options in terms of a direction my work should take and rather felt that if I were going to do something of significance, I should best follow my gut instincts and explore every impulse that came to me in terms of a new way to proceed.

CH: *What was it like to be a young artist in the '60s?*

GK: It was a great time for a young artist. I remember the time as being wide open. One could do anything, work in any way. The art world as we knew it was reinventing itself. I felt no historical constraints—putting high value on the notion of doing something new, I began to make sculptures with the thought they shouldn't look like anything I'd seen before.

CH: *In those days, you were also employed as a construction worker. How did this influence your approach to materials?*

GK: In the '60s I worked as both a roofer and an iron worker on large-scale building projects. In the course of a day's work, I became interested in the commonsense fact and behaviors of materials and the rationale of how buildings are put together. The logic of construction had an expressive potential that became the focus of my thinking and suggested a way to proceed that did not rely on current aesthetic presets. I would go home after work and in my studio replicate some of the things I witnessed on construction sites. Most importantly, I came to realize the metaphoric potential of materials and procedures that were expressive in themselves without being personal or subjective. This was my way out of the subjectivity bind of Abstract Expressionism, and the way to proceed was wide open.

CH: *Could you talk about your process-based approach?*

GK: The reliance on process, as related to material, struck me as a way to do something without having to take personal responsibility for it. To depend on the process of how a material would

behave as opposed to actually making a representation was intriguing to me.

I was interested in avoiding the subjectivity of representation, or of an object or feeling or emotion, and I found that you could objectively accomplish the same thing by setting up a situation in which the materials would do it for you, and then I would be free to either accept it or reject it—but I wasn't really involved in pushing for one result or another. It is a work method that has served me well over the years.

CH: *Why did you want to set up a framework that would exclude personal representation?*

GK: I was looking for a way to give the work an aura of objectivity that was independent of subjectivity and personal taste. I was suspicious of a personal approach. If the question arose about why a work looked as it did, I wanted to be able to say that it just happened that way and as much as possible my hand wasn't in it.

CH: *I think it's interesting that you've made "the personal" into another boundary to work against. I see this in your most recent Niagara series. These works deal with seemingly free gestures that are subject to predetermined systems. Could you say something about these works and their process?*

GK: I think there is another layer of complexity or perversity in setting up a visual structure in which to play out and trap the so-called spontaneity of the pour, the splash in the material. In earlier poured pieces, they were mostly plaster and tar, so what happened happened, and there was no external force for them to work against—they just spilled out into space, and then were trapped by constructions to determine the course of their flow. So they seem predetermined and fatalistic to me.

CH: *You often work with contradictory impulses. Could you talk about your interest in binary forces?*

GK: The *Branch Pieces* that I made in 1964 were



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some of the first works to have this binary tension—that is, forcing a relationship between two elements that otherwise one does not find in close proximity. I found that there was enormous expressive possibility in bringing such objects together. These works pitted the authority of geometric forms against a volume of tree branches and seemed to be about the vulnerability of forms, the authority of geometry, and the messiness of life.

Working with binary opposites, such as solid/liquid, hard/soft, and strong/weak, inevitably creates a tension that I find interesting. I came on this intuitively in my early work and found it a fruitful line of inquiry, and later, by design, I continued to work within these parameters.

CH: This summer you're showing part of your Berliner Serie (1979–1980) at Gaa Gallery in Wellfleet. I see this body of work as a shift in your practice; the Berliner Serie is perhaps your most formal and design-oriented work. Did this feel like a considerable change for you at the time?

GK: Most of my sculpture up to that point has to do with compressing materials, squeezing things toward a center, a kind of density, mostly by force, constrained with wire, cable, bolts. It seemed, at some moment that I can't really account for, an impulse to work in the other direction emerged: open, expansive, time-related, and sequential. I became interested in how the pieces often read from left to right, and were drawn out as opposed to compressed and timeless. It seems to me that they have an expansiveness and openness that paved the way for my recent work. ▣

CINDY HINANT is an artist and a writer based in New York. She curated the show Gary Kuehn: Postures at Joe Sheftel Gallery in 2013 and contributed an essay to the catalogue for his 2014 retrospective exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein. Her work has been shown at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Lenbachhaus Munich.

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(left to right) Rick Moran, Dick Kiusalas, Paul Chilson, Zenya Wild ALL PHOTOS BY MEG PIER

Dick Kiusalas

and the Artisans of West Barnstable Tables

FLOW, FORM, AND FATE

By Meg Pier

"You cannot dream yourself into a character;
you must hammer and forge yourself one."

— Henry David Thoreau

IT COULD BE SAID that the medium in which artisan Dick Kiusalas works is *character*. Considered as both essence and attribute, the term is evocative, inspiring, and often ennobling. In founding West Barnstable Tables in 1970, Kiusalas made a decision to be true to his own nature, and heed a calling to use his creativity and craft to channel the stories steeped within antique wood. For more than four decades, Kiusalas has built furniture pieces from architectural salvage elements that are artistic incarnations of historic artifacts, honoring the endurance, beauty, and dignity of elements that have often been a part of someone's life for centuries.

As a memoirist and personal historian, I view mining the past as a sacred calling; a compassionate curiosity is required to actively seek out the meaning, truth, and grace left abandoned in life's cluttered cubbyholes and dusty attic eaves. Not everyone has the appetite or the aptitude to discern and illuminate the strength below the scars, to strip the veneer off old secrets, to be willing to wait for the wisdom they know will eventually reveal itself with enough patience.

I drove from Boston to West Barnstable last fall to interview Kiusalas, hoping I would find a kindred spirit. Soon enough, I was getting a warm handshake from the artist on the porch of the red-shingled, antique cranberry-sorting building that houses West Barnstable Tables.

As we meandered through the showroom, Kiusalas's story unfolded, with each piece prompting a soft-spoken memory, a musing, an explanation, an observation, all related with the somewhat bemused expression of someone who seems happily at home with himself.

During our interview, I learned that he also has a gift for astutely assessing talent in other area artisans. West Barnstable Tables represents the work of several craftspeople in addition to that of its founder; the showroom and gallery feature pieces by a number of furniture makers, including Paul Chilson, Steve Loesch, Rick Moran, and Zenya Wild, as well as those of sculptor Skip Treglia. They share a love of woodworking and sense of camaraderie,

but they all have distinct styles and unique stories of how they found their way to their art and West Barnstable Tables.

MEG PIER: *Let's start at the beginning. I understand you work with found or repurposed materials. Why is that particular material of interest to you?*

DICK KIUSALAS: I was first attracted to old wood for the texture. I was interested in old barn boards that were weathered, but then I realized the color you can get out of old wood with no stain on it just because it's old. I like the distress and I found a way to disguise the distress so it could be a useful surface to eat food off of. And when I say distressed I mean nail holes, and

PAUL CHILSON

I do live-edge, free-form tables, in the style of George Nakashima, an American furniture maker who was one of the leading innovators of twentieth-century furniture design and a father of the American Craft movement. His free-form style makes his pieces look like they are floating.

"Live edge" means that I shape the edges of my tables to flow with the organic form of the wood—the ends of my tables are not uniform. I think that when a table is completely flat, it takes away from the character of the wood and it looks more natural when a table has some surface quality. I do a lot of hand-work because of the irregularities of the wood. The free-form style means using the whole tree from sap all the way into the center, from bark edge to bark edge, including all the deformities. The grain is important but it's more the outer edge that determines how the table is going to look. Sometimes the tree will talk to you and say this is the way the table is going to be and other times it's a head-banger. You get to a point and you say, "I don't know what else to do." Often, the answer comes in the middle of the night, when I wake up with a "Eureka" moment.

scratches if they were just wood floorboards. I see the distressed pieces or elements as adding character. People come here for character—the little bumps, the little holes, the little whoop-de-dos. I try to make all my furniture sensual, as if a blind person was going to buy it. They don't have to see it. They can feel the character.

Every board I look at, I go into a forensic study of everything I see or feel or smell. I find boards that have had multiple lives—they've been recycled many a time before we recycle it again. I have boards that came out of Kurt Vonnegut's house in Barnstable. I happen to know John Squibb, who married Edie Vonnegut, Kurt's daughter, and they have Kurt's house. They redid it and they took some boards out



Dick Kiusalas

of his study where he wrote all these books—and I have the boards. A while back, I found some very wide boards that came from a little local school in Barnstable with all these names carved into them. All the kids had jackknives, and when they were bored they probably just carved. Some names were very artistic, with neat letters, and others were crude. There were sailboats carved into the wood everywhere. Barnstable was a sailing community—there were no cars then. This is what kids carved. It just amazes me.

A child had carved his last name, Nye, and the way the letters were carved, you could date the period of the writing. When I saw the name Nye, I checked with a historian in Sandwich who was part of the Nye family. He knew the initials. He knew that was the son of the brother of his great-great-grandfather. Somebody from Centerville or Marstons Mills came in one day and he just had to have it. That was one of my tables that was here only a short while. Boom, out the door it went. He's never been back. But he knew he was buying a piece of Barnstable history.

MP: *Are you from this area originally? How did West Barnstable Tables come into being?*

DK: I was born in South Weymouth, then I moved with my mother and stepfather to western Mass.



Skip Treglia

In 1967, when my wife, Barbara, and I were newlyweds, I had a job selling advertising, but then I found out about a similar job on the Cape; I thought it would be a lot less stressful being on the Cape, and all I found out was the ads were smaller. I couldn't wait to get out of the rat race and work for myself. I wanted to work with my hands. Barbara was in agreement; she was working at the time as a nurse at Cape Cod Hospital, and we had some income. So, I gave my boss a three-month notice. In the meantime, I started this building of tables.

RICK MORAN

I started my craft way back in '75, when my wife and I were making stained-glass tables. Then I decided I wanted to develop myself as a furniture maker and started getting serious. It didn't happen overnight, and I'm still learning after forty-one years.

My designs are my own and reflect Shaker and Asian influences, with very clean, straight legs. Drawer pulls designed in ebony wood have become my signature. The pieces I see at West Barnstable Tables are also an influence on my work, inspiring me to incorporate the contemporary live-edge look with a very refined base. The combined styles work very nicely together.

Other than ebony, I use strictly domestic American hardwoods. I started in pine; in the early 1980s, oak was popular and then cherry became the wood of choice. I look for wood with real character. Now I am working a lot with spalted maple—spalted refers to a process, not a species, and is made from wood that has begun to decay. The patterns created by the process are pretty wild and can look psychedelic.

When I deliver a piece to a customer, I'm looking for "Wow." Then I did my job. But I'm looking for a reaction from me to begin with. If I don't feel it, the customer's not going to feel it.

SKIP TREGLIA

I've lived on the Cape for forty-four years. I met Dick not long after I moved here, when he first started his business. I bought a couple of pieces from him. Eventually, the sculptures I created seemed to fit here because they were made from material that was re-claimed. So we connected.

I work with a lot of driftwood, painted wood, metal, and bone. On the beach, I find a lot of marine mammal bones from seals and dolphins and occasionally large fish vertebrae. I made a piece in 2010 using timber that I found on Craigville Beach, which came from a dredging project that uncovered buried ribs of a ship. The body of this piece is made from a section of rust-stained timber with a driftwood, tree-limb tail. The belly is accented by a section of old copper flashing, oxidized and partially painted white. It's finished off with a crumpled rusting funnel for a head.

I often don't know what I'm going to do when I begin a project. I don't sketch things. I usually let a piece of material—a piece of wood, a piece of metal, an object—start a process. I work like it's almost a puzzle, and the process becomes, "How am I going to join this onto this? What is going to emerge from the pieces and the material?" And that process can take a long time or it can be very quick.

Eventually, a piece reaches a point where you have the satisfaction that you've said something. You've started a conversation, and to have someone appreciate what you do completes that conversation. That's where the satisfaction really reaches a high point, when you connect with someone else with what you've created.

In the beginning, I worked with an old pile of wood that was behind my garage. One rainy day, I noticed that when the water hit the wood it became a different color. I ended up building my first dining-room table out of that wood. A guy that lived across the street from me, Steve Whittlesey, had been watching what I was doing and he says, "Why don't we go into partnership?" So, in 1970, when I was thirty-two, we started working in his cellar. We were making furniture, but we weren't selling a lot—it was tight because we weren't known yet. But we became better known and things got better.

We found out about a building that was behind the Old Village Store, an old coalhouse and icehouse, bought the building, and worked there for four or five years. Then in 1976, this whole property became available—a complex of cranberry-sorting buildings that date back to the 1880s and were owned by A.D. Makepeace Company. The owners were having trouble selling it because the buildings couldn't be torn down because they're on the National Historical Register. The price was right so I sold my

house and moved into a barn here with Barbara and our three children.

At this point, Barbara and I were making a living but we were living pretty thin. Still, we felt very confident about what we were doing. We were designing creative furniture that was unlike anything we had ever seen before. It was an artistic adventure. I consider a creative piece one that's never been built before. I tell people that come in that if they're looking for a flat table, people sell flat tables everywhere. People come here for character.

See this table? This is all hand-planed marks. You can see the ripples in it if you get the light on it. Someone a couple of hundred years ago hand-planed these boards. You strip the new layers of paint off and then when you get to the

I was very lucky to meet Dick and get involved with West Barnstable Tables. Dick's influence has helped me to realize that the wood speaks for itself and that it's important to keep it simple—he knows what to leave out. You lose something when you overcomplicate.

— Steve Loesch

bottom, you're seeing the original paint—you see it talking. I feel a connection to the carpenter who worked on this. I can see him and the way he worked it.

MP: Are there any special elements in your work?

DK: At the moment, embedding orbs in the surface of my pieces as design elements is a signature of mine. The shape of an orb is a very universal form—I've never met anyone who didn't like a circle. I draw the orbs with a compass on old painted wood I've collected, then I cut them out with a band saw. You can see the thickness. I leave some part of them sticking out so people can feel the sculptural part of it. I like playing with the depth of things; what's behind, what's in front. I just try to teach people to look at things differently. Some of them will look and go home and then call a week later and say, "I can't get that table out of my mind." It's beginning to work on their psyche. Then they call again and say, "I want it. Is it still available?"

I like whimsy myself. It's fun. I've got a piece upstairs I named *Clown*. One of my furniture pieces with orbs in it was quite fun, lots of color. An interior designer brought a client in, and she wanted her to see this table. The client saw it and said, "Oh, that's too circus for me." And I said, "Oh dear." The interior decorator just rolled her eyes like, "Oh, I'm sorry I brought her here." But that sent me to my workshop and I said, "Boy, that wasn't circus enough." That's when I built *Clown*, which is a table that collapses and is almost totally useless. The legs fold under and you can't put anything on it except one little

"When the house was built, the weathervane was shaped in your image. The mermaid of you is studying a looking glass, just as you do when you study her."

What are homes if not our own reflections manifested into giants? There are looking glasses everywhere."

Excerpt from a poem by
GennaRose Nethercott
in the forthcoming book
*Living Where Land Meets Sea:
The Houses of Polhemus Savery DaSilva*





Steve Loesch

space about that big. So, we have a lot of fun.

MP: Can you define or characterize your clients?

DK: Some people are not adventuresome enough to put particular pieces in their houses. They like it but they're afraid of what their friends are going to say about it. They're flipping through magazines today and they see glass, chrome. It's got to be modern and it's got to be glass. Glass is safe. Chrome is safe. There's no flow to it at

all. There's no sex in the piece. No voluptuousness or anything. It's just sterile.

I'm not afraid of color but so many people are—they want safe colors. Earth tones, black, white, gray, brown. Color talks to you. It says things to you. But every time I step out and do something wild with color, it just sits on the gallery floor. I did an orb table with a big red orb and people are afraid of it. They're just not sure if they can look at that every morning and eat breakfast on it. I wasn't afraid to do it. I just had to do it. It was in my head and it was a political statement. The representation of these orbs is the industrial complex of this country. In the big red orb is a little green orb suffering along—meaning the environmental groups, people that are trying to make things right. I guess I'm an environmentalist.

There are people I know personally, friends of mine and even my mother, who can't understand my work. "Why don't you build normal furniture," she used to say. I'd say, "Well, Mom, I've just got to go out there and build something I've never seen before." When I'm finished, I can sell it and I don't have a problem. The fun is in building it, just building it.

Our clients are quite diverse. We've got pieces in California and we've got pieces in Switzerland. I've got a piece in Nome, Alaska. They're all over the place. We sell a lot of pieces through interior decorators. See the low ceiling here at the entrance to my workshop? In the '80s, Jackie Onassis hit her head on it so hard it went *boom!* My partner Steve looked back and said, "Are you all right?" She said, "I'm fine." She was raising her hand to rub the spot, and she stopped and brought it down and bore that pain. She didn't want to admit that she was hurt. She bought two small outdoor dining tables for her house on the Vineyard. She wanted them made out of weathered wood so they wouldn't look new.

MP: Do you feel some sense of responsibility to pass on your craftsmanship?

DK: I've had several apprentices. Watching an artist change is always great. It's an evolution. They'll do something for a while, then maybe they get bored with it, and they move to a new area and a new direction—it's very positive. They're moving up. They're going into another stage. Probably the biggest problem with getting successful as an artist is that you're going to do an awful lot of what made you successful. Then all of a sudden the fun is out of it, all the enjoyment of doing it. Because somebody wants another table with orbs in it. Let me move on in a new direction, please! Good old Picasso. He could go through his Blue Period and then say good-bye to the Blue Period and go onto the next one. People probably came to him and

ZENYA WILD

When I walked into West Barnstable Tables, I thought the furniture was really stunning as artwork in itself, beyond its function. I saw the woodworking and it clicked for me that this was what I needed and loved, and I went for it.

I was actually their very first apprentice. I learned from the beginning how to use the saws and sanders and such. How to join wood in ways that work for very old wood. How to think about function and form and the limits of the medium to end up with something in which all elements flow together in a beautiful and useful way.

I remember the first time I put finish on an old piece of wood. We were using strictly linseed oil at that time though now we don't use it as much—wineglasses leave a ring, so urethane is used more now. But I had finished sanding a piece, and then I splashed on a whole bunch of oil, moved it around with the brush. The color just jumped out and in such an exciting way. It's still a surprise to me every time. I'm just amazed at the color of old wood.

I love the interplay between beauty and function. It is a tactile thing, something about creating beauty—I love running my hands over the surface, the feel of old wood with all its stories.

said, "You got any more blue paintings?" "Nope, they're all gone. You should have bought one when I was there."

I don't have apprentices anymore. I'm of an age that I just don't want to bother. I don't know how many more years I have left, but I want to keep going. I want to putter, just putter. That's the way I want it to be, just go down to my shop and do what I want to do.

If you're creating, you're really satisfying something within yourself. I please myself when I build. It's a bonus to get someone else to recognize what you've done, but it's very much an individual thing that we do. That's something I think you learn. I don't think I always felt that way. I think there were times when I created pieces and I thought, "Why doesn't somebody else like this?" But you learn to be satisfied with what you do yourself. ❧

MEG PIER has been engaged in channeling people's stories for more than thirty years as an interviewer, a writer, an editor, a publicist, and a personal historian. A former PR executive in the financial services sector, Meg writes about travel, art, and culture for publications such as Art New England, the Boston Globe, and Huffington Post, as well as for her labor of love, www.ViewfromthePier.com. Among her favorite assignments is working as a ghostwriter to help individuals craft their memoirs.

STEVE LOESCH

I don't work from designs; it's more of an intuitive process. I set the boards out and play with them until I see a pattern that's pleasing. That does not necessarily mean it's symmetrical; I combine pieces to create a quirky balance that appeals to me.

I work with mostly old pine or chestnut. Oftentimes, the history of the boards I am using means they match each other in a certain way. For example, one drop-leaf table I made is created from four five-foot antique pine boards from an early nineteenth-century house, each of which has original paint on it. Because of how the boards were used in the construction of that house, each piece was only partially painted.

I remember one time jogging near an old house. Because it was historic, it couldn't be torn down, so there was "demolition by neglect," as it's called. You let the roof get bad and then it leaks and the house falls apart on its own. I found this fourteen-inch board, six feet high, and it had little paint strips on it. I made a little chimney cabinet and brought it here to West Barnstable Tables to sell. Chimney cabinets are tall, narrow cabinets; the Shakers made them. It took a little while to sell, but I remember who bought it—someone up on Nauset Heights that Dick knew. He'd been a regular customer here; West Barnstable Tables has a lot of repeat work.

David Shainberg

THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

By John Briggs

OUR ABIDING FASCINATION WITH David Shainberg, as a painter, psychotherapist, and pioneer in the field of consciousness studies, reflects his own fascination with the enveloping mystery of consciousness itself. What is consciousness? How does it shape our existence? Shainberg's paintings record the unfolding of his own consciousness in much the way that the fractal traceries of lines left on a beach's hard sand slope record the passing dynamical chaos of waves.

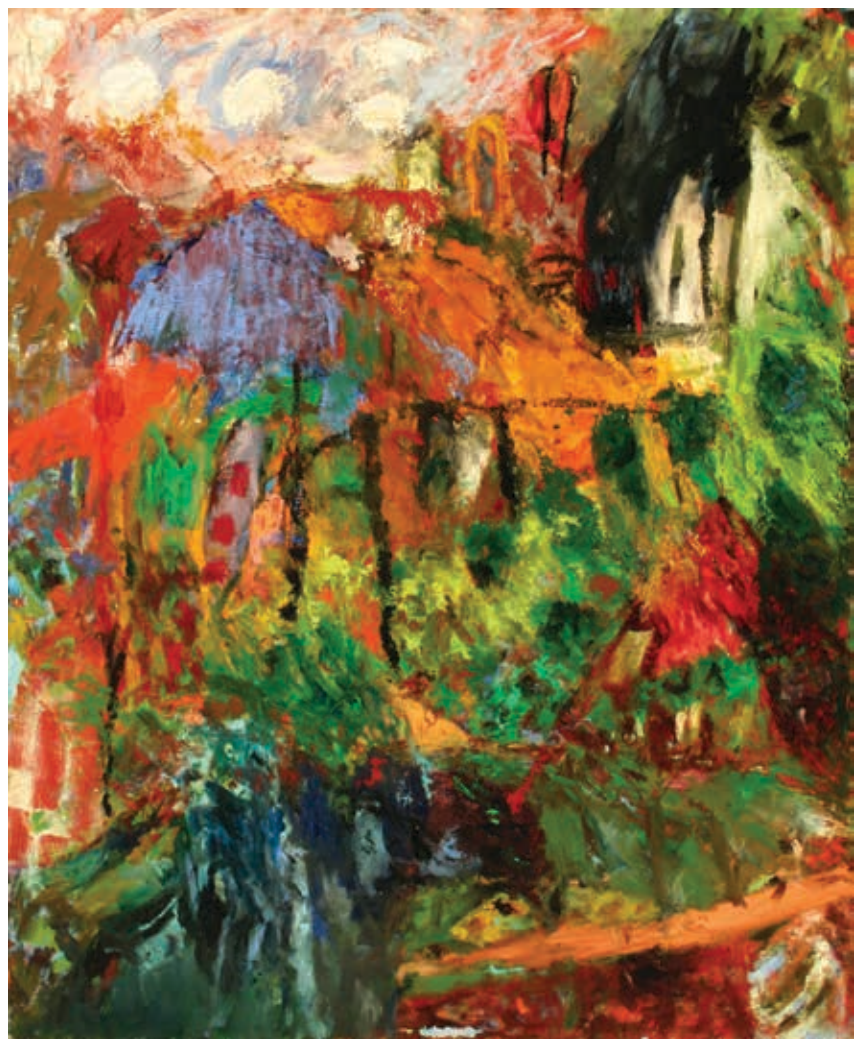
In the mid-1980s, Shainberg wrote:

In the painting process I have found the opportunity to constantly challenge the nature of consciousness. For example, I see a tendency to become fixed into believing that a particular form, a particular color relationship, is sufficient. I see myself falling into satisfactions and attempting to paint a picture that matches specific forms I recall from masters I admire. I most vividly become aware of these tendencies to get fixed or to imitate another when I look around the room or take a walk; I take another look at the picture and . . . I see new possibilities in the painting and feel connected to something larger than the painting.

Shainberg wrote these lines to explain why, after twenty years, he was leaving his work as a psychotherapist to devote himself to painting. On a summer day in 1983, as I sat with him on the windy ocean beach at Truro, having just walked down the winding sandy road from his summer home on Horse Leach Pond, he told me that his decision meant he would now entirely take up his own way of being. In the following summers when I visited him on the Cape, he was deeply immersed in his work as a painter. Every surface of his studio and clothes, even his ears, was daubed with paint as if he were a determined animal spattering dirt all around as it burrowed deeper.

He was a man of remarkable robust energy focused on intense reflection and unceasing process. Circling in my brain are his twinkling blue eyes, his hand suddenly reaching out to grab my arm affectionately, the contracting wrinkles between his brows, and the slight puzzled smile meant to provoke you to say more or go deeper.

After David's death, his fellow painter Sideo Fromboluti talked about his friend in an article in *Provincetown Arts*. For years, Fromboluti visited Shainberg's studio every two weeks, finding himself "barraged with dozens of paintings, some covering the walls, some stacked waiting to be discussed. . . . Magnificent colors, red,



Now, 1987, oil on linen, 72 by 60 inches ALL PHOTOS BY JIM ZIMMERMAN

blue, green, yellow, the whole spectrum, poured vigorously from his brush." Fromboluti wrote that "only a week before he went off to die he was discussing changes he meant to make on several canvases."

Shainberg had spent a psychiatric career with individuals severely crippled by mental illness and with those seeking a better life relieved of their neuroses; he'd had many deep dialogues with the Indian sage J. Krishnamurti and

quantum physicist David Bohm; and he'd had countless interactions with leading researchers in neurology, religious studies, and the then new field of consciousness research. From these experiences, he'd come to a basic understanding that drove "the work" as he called it. "The work" was a phrase he applied to both his painting and his therapeutic and theoretical activities, indicating that he saw them as part of his same existential task.



Dance, 1988, oil on canvas, 60 by 96 inches

Shainberg understood that consciousness defends itself from the inevitable and ceaseless uncertainty it encounters in life by forming many fixed and rigid ideas and engaging in repetitive behavior. In his 1973 book *The Transforming Self*, he theorized, for example, that a paranoid psychotic mind-set is organized around such inflexible ideas as “they’re poisoning me” and then “reads every aspect of reality” so that it fits those ideas. The psychotic is an extreme illustration of how consciousness in general works and how it generates suffering.

Shainberg saw creativity as an antidote to this rigidifying tendency of consciousness. He explained: “The psychotic is trying to make all the uncertainty into certainty. The creator *integrates* certainty and uncertainty. Creative work makes us aware of mysteries beyond mysteries.”

The painting titled *Dance* (1988) and the picture *Now* (1987) give us a sensual account of the artist’s sustained effort to “challenge the nature of consciousness,” as he termed it. For Shainberg, this required grasping how, paradoxically, a continuous forming process can evolve into an ordered whole within the frame of a painting. Steeped as he was in Bohm’s ideas about an implicate holistic order and in chaos theory’s holistic ideas of feedback and fractals, Shainberg found specific meaning in the idea of wholeness in a painting. In these two paintings, for example, the viewer can *almost* glimpse recognizable forms emerging. In *Now* the forms might seem to be a peaked roof of a house materializing beneath a sky of rolling white clouds. *Dance* might suggest the jumbled shapes of flowers, faces, undersea creatures, or a *danse macabre* of some sort. Is there a child’s joy in this activity of color and frenetic line, or is the feeling here demonic? Nothing is certain.

As David well knew, Bohm had proposed that beneath the apparent reality of objective things lies an “implicate order,” a flowing quantum order out of which seemingly separate things unfold and to which they return. Chaos offered a different but related view. In chaos theory the universe is depicted as a ceaseless interlocking flux of feedbacks, between objects and processes, a density of feedbacks in dynamical systems such that one might say that the things themselves are really nothing but their feedbacks. You can feel both the implicate order and the energy of chaotic feedbacks in these two paintings.

In an undated artist’s statement, Shainberg wrote that he was “intrigued to develop rhymes of shapes in space, in color, or simply by making other solid forms. Those rhymes and the act of rhyming seem to make me feel more whole as they also make the painting more whole.” The word *rhymes* refers to an idea we’d frequently discussed.

In the complex, dynamical systems of nature described by chaos theory, everything feeds back into everything else, and this continuous feedback ties the system together and makes it integral and whole. The feedback-linked movements and patterns seen at the large scale of a chaotic dynamical system manifest at smaller scales as well. Crashing waves, changing weather, and Shainberg’s

paintings all have a holism made of fractal self-similarity at many scales. Jackson Pollock’s later work offers an example of fractality in abstract art. If you zoom in and examine a small piece of a Pollock drip painting, you find it has the same form, rhythm, and color distribution as is seen at larger scales. This is one indication of what Shainberg meant by “rhyming” that can “make the painting whole.”

In several of the paintings displayed here you see, or rather feel (because it’s not always obvious), the rhyming in color, form, and rhythms of line, at various scales. Look, for instance, at *Connecting* (1987). Amorphous as a flame, the eye-catching red shape at the

bottom left corner of the painting is very roughly mirrored in the hulking white, gray, and black mass on the right, and you can feel the tension between them underscored by the red strokes that “connect” them. This is like the tension in a rhyme, say, the tension between the words *meet* and *unseat*. This rhyming shape shows up in small scale in the black brushstrokes found in the rectangular mass dominating the middle left of the painting. Here, the shape perhaps betrays the feeling of the artist poking his brush, “connecting” it with the canvas. *Connecting* also seems suggestive of



Connecting, 1987, oil on linen, 40 by 32 inches



Untitled (Lung Series), 1992, acrylic on canvas, 60 by 40 inches

a landscape, a picture perhaps of trees, hedges, bushes, and maybe even a dog.

Consciousness, of course, reflexively seeks an interpretation, a way to read the painting as some kind of certain meaning. But Shainberg worked hard to avoid or subvert that reflex in his own brain, and to help his viewers to subvert it in theirs. What you recognize in the painting is both there and not there. The result renders the painting elusively meaningful without turning it into a lead-box repository of a few treasured gems of meaning.

Rhyming in poetry, like metaphor in poetry, calls for appreciating the differences between elements as well as their similarities: You see the differences between one “part,” or locus, of the painting and other parts. But you also simultaneously experience the similarities. In their amorphous way, many of the shapes in *Connecting* are simultaneously similar to and different from each other. A rhyme is a form of metaphor. The differences and similarities feed into each other, making a whole. As a result of this process, in which everything in the painting affects, changes, and feeds back into everything else, the painting emerges as both dynamical and integrated. Parts rhyme, simultaneously join and separate, and seem to radiate from beneath the surface.

Shainberg was well aware that what he was aiming for in the whole, in the finished, or in the *almost* finished painting (since in a universe of change nothing can ever be finished) was a metaphor in the deepest creative sense. In his artist’s statement, he said that the painting “is a metaphor for the being born now in the present. And, as it is being born, I often feel I too am being born in the act of painting.” Shainberg wanted each painting “to exist without reference

to any other form, that is, not to represent anything but itself.” He wanted the painting to be “a reality in a fundamental way that resonates with the process of making an object of perception.”

In *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, Jonah Lehrer observes that Cézanne laid down “layers of brushstrokes, so precise in their ambiguity” that the painting constituted “what reality looks like before it has been resolved by the brain.” The brain of the viewer completes the Cézanne painting by assembling the raw, bunched, and random inputs of colors and lines into a reality made of recognizable objects. In a similar way, Shainberg’s images take us to a place of raw perception, perhaps the place of an infant’s perception before there are words and lines that divide and define one object from another. It is a place “not of objects,” he wrote in his last journals, but a place where “the observer is the observed.” Instead of objects, there are dynamic, metaphorical ten-

sions, as in *Connecting*.

Shainberg’s paintings often convey another form of metaphor as well: There is the aura of almost recognizable shapes—a house, a tree, pieces of fruit, an almost familiar energy joining colors or forms. There is the sharp feel of nature in many of the paintings, such as *A Place of Quiet* (1990), in which appear moments of blue sky and green leaf, an aura of wind and clarity; at the same time the scene suggests confusion or excited activity. Think of yourself as an infant seeing the new world freshly, your body vibrating. You’re seeing what Shainberg found when he challenged his own consciousness and peered beneath the racing currents and eddies of his thoughts. The world of a Shainberg painting is metaphorically similar to the fixed world of certainties and forms that our consciousness believes it knows—but it is also a world where uncertainty runs wild at every moment.


Shainberg accounted himself an Abstract Expressionist, in the vein of Pollock, but he was skeptical of most labels, too, including that one. His tastes and enthusiasms in modern art were eclectic. In his last journals, he ruminated at length about the Matisse paintings he had seen at the monumental Matisse retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1992. Toward the end of his life, I remember him urging me to see more of Milton Avery’s work. He was fascinated by Frank Stella and commented in his journal, “Stella’s point that he is struggling to be free of the image doesn’t take into consideration that he creates the image of Stella.”

In some of his last journal entries, Shainberg suggests he was thinking that his own future work might go in the direction of a kind of new representative realism that could reintroduce recognizable objects into the mix. He intuited

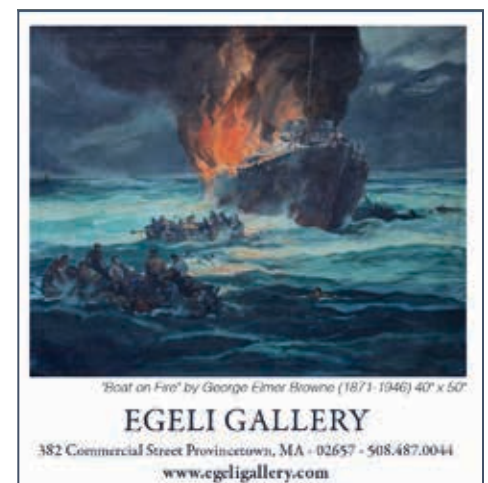
this new painting as possibly a “Zen process where [in the schema of representation] a tree is a tree and a mountain is a mountain is a mountain and so on, and then [in abstraction] a tree is not a tree and a mountain is not a mountain and then [returning to an innocent representation] a tree is a tree and a mountain is a mountain.” He wondered if it were possible to regain a kind of childlike innocence about objects, a sense of their inherent authenticity, what he thought Matisse might have possessed toward the end of his life. Shainberg’s *Untitled* (1992) may reflect this new aesthetic. The painting is from his *Lung Series*, made as his illness grew fatally acute. The lungs as an object are here, seemingly embedded in the surrounding jets and currents of blue atmosphere. Subject and object, inside and outside, are entwined, whole, yet an object is clearly there.

Shainberg was eager to pursue painting wherever it took him. I fancy him as like a Paleolithic big-game hunter, tirelessly tracking the sacred animal along whatever twists and turns and backtracking paths it takes, meanwhile understanding his own consciousness as a conjuring trick, a self made out of mirrors.

Let me end with an important caution: Shainberg’s work in psychotherapy and consciousness does not explain his paintings. The artist would have insisted on that. His paintings were intended to be experienced, entered into, not thought over or puzzled out. They don’t mean anything, I believe he would have said, though they are richly meaningful. They invite us to subvert the meaning of meaning, and see reality anew.

David died in December 1993 of an idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a cruel autoimmune disease that choked the air from his lungs. He was sixty-one, at the height of his artistic powers. But his legacy is still remembered and celebrated: a retrospective of his work will be on exhibit this fall at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (PAAM). 

JOHN BRIGGS is an emeritus distinguished professor of creator aesthetics and the author of several well-known books on creativity, chaos theory, and aesthetics. He is a creative writer and fine art photographer. He was a longtime friend of David Shainberg.



André van der Wende's

REVOLVING WORLD

By Christopher Busa

ANDRÉ VAN DER WENDE hails from Down Under, an expression that refers to Australia, New Zealand, and other countries that are in the Southern Hemisphere, “below” many other parts of the world. Interestingly, some of the best art critics in the world come from this remote location. Robert Hughes, author of *The Shock of the New*, a mesmerizing study of Modernist painting, and *The Fatal Shore*, about the founding of Australia through the exile of adventuresome British outlaws, brought a fierce independence to his cultural narratives. And Sebastian Smee, the Pulitzer Prize-winning art writer for the Boston Globe, is also a native of Australia. Perhaps this unusual location provides an exceptional perception—Van der Wende, certainly, has been gifted with fresh vision, in his writing and his artwork.

Van der Wende was born in a small town on the southern tip of New Zealand. He received a BFA in painting and printmaking from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand in 1987, and then found his way to the University of Connecticut at Storrs, where he received an MFA in 1993. A certified yoga instructor, now living in Orleans on the Cape, he has also established himself as a prolific writer on art and artists for *Art New England*,

Artscope, the *Cape Cod Times*, and *Provincetown Arts*, where he has contributed feature articles on Anne Packard, Selina Trieff, Berta Walker, and, last year, on Paul Bowen.

I asked if Van der Wende might comment on the relation of the visual and the verbal in how he thinks about art.

“This big subject,” he said, “has challenged me, both as a writer and painter, to articulate what I am feeling, both in visual terms and in language. I was just talking about this with the artist Jen Bradley during my recent show at the Schoolhouse Gallery. I connect better with work if I can describe what I see in words. Associations begin to abound. Before I started my piece on Paul Bowen, I told him that I wanted to approach the writing as one artist talking to another. My interest is in the studio practice—that’s what I write from. What may differentiate me as an arts writer from others is that I have my own intense studio practice.”

An artist who is also a critic may possess insight that a critic lacks, since the artist understands the psychological problems of the creative process—how one moves toward resolution in a work, or, more fundamentally, how to understand what one is trying to resolve in the first place. There is a philosophical dimension in making a painting, a balancing of forces in the tension that holds them together, like a mathematical equation or a graceful sentence, where the writer balances words, adjusting the rising and falling of cadence like a shift of weight. Art, of course, is mute, but critics give the image a voice, make it speak to an attentive viewer.

When Van der Wende speaks about the context of studio practice, I am reminded of what a prominent art historian once told me about how he approaches his research—he’s like a detective, going back to the scene of the crime, the deed that was done in the studio at a certain point in time and in specific circumstances. The intention is to identify the clues that track a series of discoveries, decisions, and surprises. One of the reasons I was attracted to Van der Wende’s writing, and equally to his paintings, is that he clearly thinks for himself—there is not a lot of quotation from others or references to received ideas.

“That is very deliberate,” he said. “Though there are certainly critics I admire—I love Robert Hughes and Jerry Saltz. When I read people like Saltz, I start to like them a little too much, and lose my own voice, so I deliberately avoid over-immersion. If I’m researching a subject, I’ll read what’s been written about it for context and historical



Aotearoa, 2014, oil on panel, 16 by 12 inches

background, but I refrain from reading too deeply. That would drive me nuts.”

It’s very important for a viewer of art to have a personal, emotional reaction to what the eyes see. If you register that feeling, you can go back and reference the moment, not as an idea, but as the feeling itself, so it retains a primal reality as an experience. Van der Wende’s new work embodies this visceral sense. His recent show at the Schoolhouse Gallery is called *A Small Revolving World: New Paintings*, the title based on a song he often plays at an “excruciatingly” high volume while working in his studio. He has a passion for music, and, for him, the connection between music and studio practice is strong. He likes to think of his paintings as very self-contained, encompassing a world of their own: “For me, for a painting to be finished, to be convincingly done, it needs to be a small world unto itself, as if I’ve brought into clarity forms that were latently present. Certainly, my paintings can reference worlds outside their own four sides, but my desire is to encapsulate.”

Using the word *revolving* in the title of his show, Van der Wende suggests motion. Looking at his paintings, I am struck by dual motions, energy going this way, then that, like gusts of wind or curls of smoke, twisting and shooting in unexpected directions. The logic of the patterns seems very natural, as if they were produced organically, following the laws of physics or chemistry. This activation recalls to me what Hans Hofmann felt about the importance of dynamism in a painting. The surface had to be activated in order to be interesting. Van der Wende’s work makes me think of motion in sports, when you are moving from balance point to balance point even as you are in motion, maintaining a center of gravity while going through stages, positions, or steps. This same process produces in a painting what we call unity, a flow of harmony.

One painting from Van der Wende’s exhibition, *Blue & Silver Zig-Zag*, though not large, has an impact in its element of pathways, playfully intersecting tracks of blue, silver, and white. But he also introduces another element with the use of a squeegee, emphasizing the undersurface by smearing it with a directional force, and revealing the trace of its passage. Lots of local interest is achieved in particular passages, where you can see how the paint was laid down. The colors, of course, the silver and the blue, with white halos, are very pleasing. One has the feeling of a mind in a state of reverie—a blue-and-silver happiness.

Another painting of the same size, *Aotearoa*, expresses more angst. The title refers to a native name for New Zealand—the Maori called New Zealand “the land of the long white cloud.” Van der Wende told me that his painting was originally placed horizontally, so a long white streak that now ascends vertically on the right of the birchwood panel, would have floated above the implied landscape of the island. Maybe that’s the way New Zealand looks on a map, with the north island above and the south island, where Van der Wende grew up, on the bottom. The Maori, like the Australian aborigines, are deeply connected, spiritually, to the land. Balclutha, the small town where Van der Wende was born, had only about four thousand people; he lived there until he was about five or six before moving to Christchurch. But that memory still, to this day, has a strong impact on his work. The landscape, then, near to water, has an uncanny similarity to his current home on Cape Cod, where the bay has an expanse of flats and wide water. “I feel I am trying to reconcile where I am now,” he said.

Australian aborigines remember their history through the geography of the land; the country’s mythic memory can be traced in sacred locations. In André van der Wende’s artwork, we recognize the influence of culture, the coming together of person and place, and the indefinable sacredness that inhabits each. ■

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is founder and editorial director of Provincetown Arts Press.



Blue & Silver Zig-Zag, 2014, oil on panel, 16 by 12 inches



A Small Revolving World, 2015, oil on panel, 10 by 8 inches

Ray Elman's Portraits

AN ARCHIVE OF THE VITAL PAST

By Alec Wilkinson

RAY ELMAN BEGAN PAINTING portraits of artists and writers on the Outer Cape in 1989. He had read *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, a sort of seeker's manual by G. I. Gurdjieff, and he felt that he was assembling a similar archive of a place and a period and that, since the subjects were men and women whose work and friendship meant something to him, the archive itself was a form of autobiography.

Elman had arrived in Provincetown from New York City in the fall of 1970, when he was twenty-five. Nearly everything he owned had fit into an old, green Chevy van whose contents had included ten big, blank canvases and a collection of instructional tapes made by Richard Alpert, the Harvard psychologist and spiritual convert who took LSD with Timothy Leary, changed his name to Baba Ram Dass, and wrote the proselytizing book *Be Here Now*. Elman's plan had been to arrive where he knew no one and devote himself to painting and reading and contemplation, which is amusing, if you know him, since he is indefatigably gregarious. Immediately, he met people who involved him in the life of the town, most notably Terry Kahn, who was a reporter for the *Provincetown Advocate*. Kahn would walk up and down Commercial Street, having conversations and collecting material. He was as deeply intimate with the life of the town as a cop.

Through Terry, Elman met the writer Jack Kahn, Terry's father, who had spent summers in Truro since the 1940s. Knowing Jack Kahn got Elman into the tennis community of artists and writers and psychiatrists that gathered each afternoon at Kahn's court in Truro. In college, Elman had been an accomplished squash player, but his tennis game looked wrong. If I close my eyes, I see a forehand with which he appeared to slash at the ball like a fencer rather than drive it with any force or control. Watching him, you thought it should be easy to defeat him, but it wasn't. He was tenacious, and his awkward forehand had hardly any backswing, so it was difficult to catch him unprepared. Also, he had a scrambly way of moving, and he reached more shots than you expected him to. Whether he lost or won, however, he was cheerful. Everyone always seemed pleased to see him. He had curly



Tinkerbell Is... (Raymond Elman), 1990, oil and digital collage on canvas, 14 by 9 inches

black hair and a thin beard and glasses, and, in all things, he cared whether the people around him were enjoying themselves as much as he was.

The first portrait Elman made shows two figures in profile, Jack Kahn and his friend Palmer Williams, who was an executive at *60 Minutes*. The two of them are sitting on either side of a low table on which there is a backgammon board. Kahn played backgammon in New York at the Harvard Club, across the street from his office at the *New Yorker*, and he played with Williams most summer days. Usually, they would play tennis first. Kahn lived in an old farmhouse off South Pamet Road. In the sixties, he had a tennis court built in his

backyard, down in a hollow; today, it might be considered a wetlands violation. He wrote in the morning, in a studio in an old garage, where there were some bookshelves and chairs, a desk with a typewriter and drawers with *New Yorker* stationary, some of it the onionskin type that was for airmail. To preserve silence for Kahn to work, the court was to remain empty until two. After that, anyone who knew Jack or his wife or his sons, or was a friend of someone who did, was welcome for doubles. You had to bring a can of balls and leave them, whether you had opened them or not. By the side of the court was a garbage can of tennis balls, which Sheldon Caldwell, the pro from the Provincetown

Tennis Club, used in giving lessons to the three Kahn boys.

Around four, Kahn would drink Bloody Marys and play backgammon with Williams. Since Kahn is wearing blue jeans in the portrait and not tennis clothes, and since the foliage in the background is yellow more than green, I am assuming the image was made in the fall. In the men's deep engagement there is something innocent and childlike.

AMONG THE MORE COMMON impressions made by an archive, if it is substantial enough, is that the past existed with the same vitality as the present. I think this is true whether the archive is made up of art, writing, or merely objects. When I look at Elman's portraits, I am surprised at how much time they span, even though the time within them seems always to be the present, and also by the people who are no longer here, who lived their lives as intently as we live ours now. I am also struck by the concentration of accomplishment. Motherwell and Mailer would be towering figures in any community, but there are also Stanley Kunitz and Justin Kaplan and Joel Meyerowitz. That there are fewer women of the first rank says more about the period and the struggle for women artists to gain the recognition they deserved than it does about what they achieved.

Most places I can think of that used to have artists, such as Soho, Springs, and Provincetown, don't have artists anymore, really, except prosperous ones and ones who managed to hold on, like shopkeepers who bought their premises when they were cheap. I don't intend this observation cynically, it's merely the way of the world. Congregations of artists, who draw others in their wake, are like a kind of wildlife whose arrival indicates that a place is changing, the way the lily pads in the ponds in the Cape woods are an indication that the ponds are on their way to being meadows.

In my childhood—that is to say, in the 1950s and '60s—I think Provincetown was still a place where artists could find cheap places to live. The sand and the sky and the deep perspectives of water were as attractive to painters then as they are now, maybe more so. If not the actual subject of their paintings, the Cape is at least conceptually important to their paintings; it is the context in which the paintings were made and an influence on them. Hopper's Cape Cod is both real and imaginary and has in its light and forms—the chaste, weathered houses and the figures in the windows looking out at the lit fields—the longing that people tend to feel for the place and often also feel while inhabiting the place.

In Elman's portraits, the landscape is a stage on which the people register. In the portraits that have the land or the water as a background, the setting is indicated more than delineated. It is immanent more than present, meaning that it suggests more than specifies. It conveys privilege, since being in such a beautiful place can only be the result of money made

and spent, but also the good fortune of being there at all.

RAY ELMAN GOT ME hired by the Provincetown Art Association in 1978, when I was twenty-six. I was called a researcher, and I was to write grants, when there were any to write, and text for the catalogues. I spent a lot of time looking through old catalogues and clippings in file cabinets about artists' balls and plays at the Provincetown Playhouse and Charles Hawthorne's painting school in the barn on the hill above the town. Many of the photographs showed ladies in long skirts and hats standing in front of easels that were sometimes facing a still life or a model and other times were set up on a dune or in the middle of town on a pier. Hawthorne wore a tie and a smock and appeared to move among the students like the local eminence he was.

When I had time to myself, I sometimes went down a set of concrete stairs and unlocked the vault where the permanent collection was kept. There was a lot of donated work that nobody needed, but also some very good paintings and drawings, by Hawthorne, Raphael Soyer, Milton Avery, Gifford Beal, Edwin Dickinson, Henry Varnum Poor, and others. From the clippings and catalogues and the works, I developed an impression of the artists who had come to Provincetown forty and fifty years earlier and spent the summer working and drinking, visiting one another's studios, going up and down Commercial Street to openings, and engaging in gossip and art-world mischief. The life, in other words, of what was later called the Provincetown Art Colony.

What I remember of Provincetown in the fifties and early sixties, when I might be taken there from Wellfleet by my parents, is beatniks.

They wore jeans and T-shirts and sandals and berets. (Susan Baker, who also worked at the Art Association, told me that she planned an imaginary memoir of bohemian life called "I Wore a Beret.") I was a child, so the beatniks loomed over me, and I had to look up to see them—it seemed as if they conducted their lives in the sky. I could tell that they formed a sort of freemasonry, that they shared agreements about art and life; I saw their kind nowhere else, but they appeared in concentration in the summers in Provincetown. They seemed cranky and always on their way somewhere, and they gave me an idea of adult life as composed of a series of tribes with rites and arcane practices.

When I worked at the Art Association, the artists' colony seemed to exist in the past, like Haight-Ashbury. Sometimes two older men would be talking and a third would arrive, and they would stare at each other, and the silence was uncomfortable, and only later did someone explain to me that years earlier each of them had taken separate sides in the abstract-versus-figurative painting argument, which they regarded as ongoing.

I'M NOT SURE how far a photograph can go to give the impression of someone's company. I'm not sure a photograph can capture joy. Or love, except by inference. Too many interpretations might apply for a photograph to be a reliable record. A photograph anyway is undermined by its cousin, the moving image, standing to either side of each frame and suggesting that the moment depicted was only one in a series of moments, another one of which might more completely convey a scene or a person's character or the sense of his or her company. There is also the complication of static time versus



The Backgammon Players (E. J. Kahn, Jr., and Palmer Williams), 1989, oil and digital collage on canvas, 60 by 72 inches



Pamet River Valley (Alec Wilkinson), 2008, oil and digital collage on canvas, 40 by 60 inches

time passing, something that David Hockney tried to address in his Polaroids. The fact of something is what the camera conveys, which becomes more abstruse as the facts approach the landscape of feeling.

A painting isn't necessarily restricted in the ways that photographs are. Being the result of a long engagement, a painting can exclude details, and foreground others, as a photograph can't without being subjected to other uses. The difference between a painting and a photograph, perhaps, is like that between a tape recording of casual speech and the text of a theatrical monologue. A painting can be revised while underway and is guided toward an end in the way that prose or poetry or dialogue is guided. A photographer may bring to his or her work ideas, an aesthetic sense, an intention, a plan, a history, and a vocabulary, but he or she has only that instant when the shutter closes to combine all of them. Avedon had his photographs bleached in the lab to highlight areas of a face, which made the expressions

and the faces and even the moment appear to be more dramatic, but that didn't necessarily change the character of the sitter.

This summer, Elman's portraits are on view at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. It is interesting to me that the portraits began as photographs, snapshots, really. The transformation they undergo in being enlarged and painted over—the manipulation, that is, which has its own formality—seems essential to the impression they make.

The portraits of Alan Dugan, Motherwell, and Kunitz are perhaps the most successful, but that may be because the subjects are famous, and one brings other knowledge to the images. I am partial to the informal portrait of the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler working on his house, partly because, aside from Motherwell, Huebler was probably the most widely known artist on the Outer Cape, but also because he was entirely unassuming. He never discussed his work, that I am aware of—I played tennis with him for several years without knowing what he

did—and I'm not even sure how many people grasped it anyway. It was years before I understood his significance, and by then he was no longer alive. One of the unhappy elements of growing older is losing important people who know important things that it might have been broadening to hear from the source.

Sometimes the informality of Elman's portraits reveals something that might not have emerged in a formal portrait. When I look at Joel Meyerowitz's portrait, I think of his superlative photographs, of course, but I also think of his telling me that his early street work had something to do with his father's having been an appreciator of street scenes. When Meyerowitz was a child, his father would sometimes tip him off to something about to happen, two people coming around a corner not knowing the other was there, perhaps, and about to bump into each other. A man about to step on a banana peel. The openness and vitality of Meyerowitz's expression seems to embody the pleasure taken in the world theater, the theater of the actual. Justin Kaplan looks like a bust of himself, the distinguished writer, floating like a monument in his kayak. The writer Betty Jean Lifton's inquiring and interested face is characteristic of how I recall her. What the usually sedate architect Mark Hammer is doing wearing a mask and snorkel, and with his arms spread as if he were about to take flight, I have no idea, but he seems like someone who would do that on an impulse.

The writer Anne Bernays, drawing breath, rises from the bay as if with an idea she had found by tunneling down into the water. The portraits' having been altered from their images as photographs gives them a mysterious quality, as if they can't quite be placed in time; they are both familiar and remote. The portraits of Dugan and Motherwell seem to capture the feeling of their company. Dugan's fierceness, the word-lover. The warrior. "I have risen to the morning danger and feel proud," he wrote. And one notes the intelligence in Motherwell's face, and the engagement of his gaze, as if he saw more things than other people did. The portrait of Robert Reich, with its classical composition, is on the edge of some high form of journalism. The people seem like branches parted to reveal the figure at the center. By the arrangement of figures, the portrait of Ethan Cohen and his daughters travels straight down the family line as if in front of the viewer's eyes.

RAY IS A GENUINELY well-wishing person, which appeals to me. It suggests a generosity of feeling and a larger habit of mind than simple self-engagement. He must lose his temper, but I have never seen it. Nor have I ever heard him make fun of someone or degrade anyone. These, I think, are rare traits and honorable. ▀

ALEC WILKINSON, the author of ten books, has been a writer at the New Yorker since 1980. Before that he was a policeman in Wellfleet, and before that he was a rock-and-roll musician.



Pictured Above Is at Least One Person Who Is Always Fixing His House (Douglas Huebler), 1993, oil and digital collage on canvas, 43 by 60 inches

Danielle and Elizabeth Mailer on Adele Morales Mailer

ARTIST TO THE CORE

By Susan Rand Brown

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2015, Adele Morales Mailer breathed her last, following the slow decline—darkness with spots of gaiety and light—associated with dementia. Now Danielle, an artist, and Elizabeth, a writer, Adele's only children and the second and third oldest of Norman Kingsley Mailer's brood of nine, are revisiting mythologies of family dysfunction and violence that have refused to stay buried. Painter, actress, memoirist, and mother, a flamboyant figure associated with high drama, Adele was the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Mailer's second wife, often described as the Mailer wife stabbed with a penknife. The 1961 episode, chronicled in Adele's memoir, *The Last Party: Scenes From My Life With Norman Mailer* (1997), remains so vivid as to define her public identity: "the wife whom."

Having been exposed to near life-long speculation about the violence that tore their family apart, Danielle and Elizabeth are protective of their privacy, yet willing to explore, publicly, their mother's legacy. Who was Adele Mailer apart from Norman?

A love for Provincetown frames much of this conversation. Norman began visiting Provincetown in the mid-1940s; he brought Adele with him in 1951, and they married in 1956. "Those first summers in Provincetown were an important part of my life with Norman," Adele wrote in her memoir, "that special light illuminating a bit of happiness against the dark background of his shifting moods. The same light that darkened and flickered out during that last psychotic summer of 1961, the year a part of me died." Adele, an Abstract Expressionist

who painted with Hans Hofmann in New York and Provincetown, continued to rent East End apartments over the next two decades, welcoming her daughters, painting, hosting parties, and involving herself with Provincetown's theater community.

A publisher has expressed interest in reprinting Adele's memoir, newly appreciated for its literary and historical qualities, rather than dismissed as a juicy confessional written by the injured wife of a famous writer with a score to settle. With a sharp eye for detail, Adele writes engagingly and often poetically about her cinematic adventures.

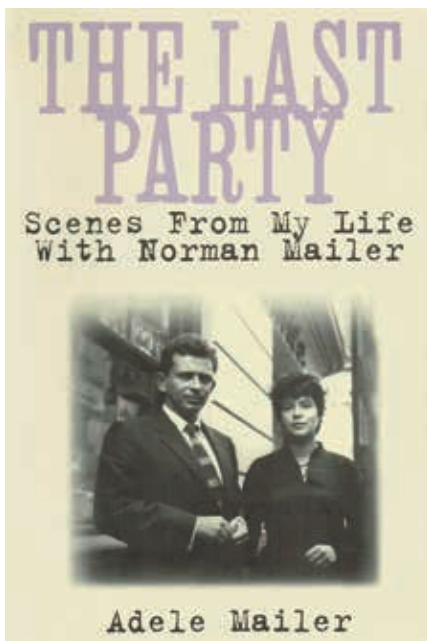
AS A WRITER, Elizabeth was posting on Facebook as Adele was close to death, posts continuing as part of her grieving and healing process. For Danielle, healing through restoring the "good mother" whose life was derailed by the stabbing and its aftermath began more than a decade ago, when she began to create a series of elaborate portraits of women, her deftly veiled images embedding her mother's trauma while celebrating her resilience. Danielle's coming of age through her art—the healing of her own buried child—is described by this writer in "On Keeping the Tapestry Whole," featured in the 2015/16 issue of this magazine.

Danielle's paintings also reflect love and admiration for her father; he took her to museums and encouraged her as an artist. Elizabeth's memoir also reflects a close attachment



Adele Mailer, 1997

PHOTO BY JEFFREY HORNSTEIN



to Norman; after many decades, he was able to acknowledge her as "another writer in the family." (See Elizabeth Mailer's keynote speech from the Tenth Annual International Conference of the Norman Mailer Society.)

As part of Elizabeth and Danielle's efforts to rebalance Adele's complex legacy—despite trauma, poverty, and less than perfect health, Adele lived to ninety—the sisters agreed to this interview with *Provincetown Arts*. Some information (and corroborating details) comes from Adele's foundational memoir; most comes from separate interviews with the sisters, conducted in person and by e-mail.

SUSAN RAND BROWN: *What are some stories Adele told of her life as a girl and young woman, illuminating her identity as a painter, an actress, and a writer?*

ELIZABETH MAILER: My mother had only a high-school education. She went to Washington Irving on East Sixteenth Street. She got all As in English and art. Her teachers told her that she had the potential to be a very good writer and an excellent artist. My mother didn't believe it—her mother was always saying: "Oh, don't bother. That's too hard. You won't be able to do that." Instinctively, my mother knew that she needed to break from her parents and experience life on her own.

DANIELLE MAILER: Adele was a small-town girl from Coney Island. In her wacky but restrictive Spanish/Peruvian upbringing (she refers to her home in her memoir as a Latina Woody Allen household), she did the remarkable. She left home at eighteen for a different kind of life. The first time we saw John Travolta's *Saturday Night Fever* she got teary. "I was the girl in the film," she told us. "That was me, the provincial gal from Brooklyn who wanted to better herself." Her new life began in a cold-water flat in lower Manhattan. Using her artistic skills, she landed a job in a papier-mâché display house, able to pay her modest rent (twenty dollars a month, heat included) by making figures for department store windows. She became masterful at this technique.

She reinvented herself, shed the Brooklyn accent, and got book smart, reading to self-educate. By the time she met my father, she was ensconced in an exciting life. Her paintings were gaining momentum and peers like Jim Dine, Helen Frankenthaler, and Marisol were part of her pack. She dated Jack Kerouac and befriended Dan Wolf, cofounding editor of the *Village Voice*. Meeting Dad changed everything.



Sweet Valentine, 1990, mixed-media collage, 12 by 12 inches

Trading in her creative life to be Norman's muse was a choice she made with disastrous results.

EM: While creating displays for Macy's department store, she joined the Art Students League, doing charcoal and pencil sketches of live models as well as pastel, watercolor, and oil painting. Adele said the Art Students League was a substantial part of her training and foundation. She also studied with Hans Hofmann in New York City and in Provincetown. He'd often praise her beautiful paintings. "Adele, you are a Colorist. Like Matisse," Hofmann once told her.

SRB: *Tell me about Adele as a parent.*

DM: We frequented the Central Park Zoo (she loved the monkey corner), the Museum of Natural History, and, of course, the Museum of Modern Art, but she was just as excited by FAO Schwarz, marveling kid-like at the toys. She was a fun mom who also kept track of our bedtime, our meals, our homework, and our moods. I remember the three of us sitting companionably with our metal 1950s TV trays watching *All in the Family* and eating spaghetti Bolognese. Those were happy times.

As a young child arriving home from school, I was greeted by Mom the artist in her customary uniform: paint-spattered jeans, an old sweatshirt, and fingers stained with colored oil paints. Our various apartments, bohemian in flavor, morphed into a giant studio, and the room with the best light invariably became her workspace. A palette filled with juicy globs of paint could be found on a coffee table, our kitties—always at least two—stepping

precariously close. It was not unusual to discover violet, orange, red, and green paw prints sprinkling the parquet floor.

Adele's large Abstract Expressionist-style paintings, reminiscent of her Hans Hofmann days, graced every corner, forever changing to reflect her organic, intuitive, and entirely unformulaic approach. As she painted away, so did I, junior-size easel in my room/studio and a dozen blank canvases ready to go. My sister might be in her room, writing a short story or creating a poem. We were an artsy family in the truest sense, and Adele's approach to life had a lasting influence on my own creative path.

EM: In the late '70s, Adele began to do Joseph Cornell-like shadow boxes, assemblages, and collages, collecting various objets d'art, knick-knacks, odds and ends from the Upper East Side thrift shops and even from the street. So committed was she to her vision, her apartment on East Seventy-Eighth Street slowly morphed into what she described as her "Joseph Cornell garage." In that sense, even the apartment's clutter became an extension of her art. Over two decades, Adele became something of a mad collector of anything and everything that was colorful, quirky, ugly, funny, shocking, poignant, or lovely: a fake mustache, a plastic mini-skeleton, windup teeth, silk flowers, a small bottle cloudy with age, a foil candy wrapper, a vintage postcard, a black lace garter belt. She had a brilliant eye for juxtaposition.

She saw herself as a walking canvas. "What I wear, what jewelry I put on, what colors I choose . . . all of this is an extension of my art," she once said. "I am so in tune with color, I literally wince when I see two shades of green that clash. But when the colors I wear are harmonious, I feel peaceful."

SRB: *Adele clearly had a flair for decorating. Danielle, was this a source of your own bold use of color?*

DM: Yes. Our couch would be transformed from purple velvet to a leopard print with throw pillows and fringe lampshades, constructed in an impromptu style. The colors and patterns of our homes were forever in flux, like some giant still life, part Matisse, part Frida Kahlo, part Mark Rothko. These visuals seared into my psyche, found their way into my artistic voice, and continue as an ever-present source of inspiration.

SRB: *Adele portrays her life as filled with drama. Her memoir also describes her interest in acting. Can you describe this aspect of her creative aspirations?*

EM: I don't believe she had any formal instruction until her late twenties, when she enrolled at the Actors Studio. Her instructor was none other than Lee Strasberg. At some point, Adele was in the same class as Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando, before they were famous.

In her late thirties, she went on to develop her craft with opera and theater director Frank Corsaro. She also trained with Mort Siegel in improvisation. She loved to go onstage. When Danielle



Dancing Muses, 1989, mixed-media collage, 36 by 24 inches



Adele in 2007

and I were little, she entertained us with impressions of a roaring lion, a gorilla, a crying baby, a singing whale, a barking dog, and a belly dancer, getting us to roar and bark and dance with her. She'd play Miriam Makeba on the phonograph and teach us to dance the Watusi. Adele came from a long line of funny and eccentric Spanish women: she could be hilarious, onstage and off.

My mother's sister, Joanna (or Joanie), ten years younger than my mother [Joanna married actor Mickey Knox, who became one of Mailer's closest friends], had an unforgettable way of bringing a bit of Brooklyn humor and sensibility to Italy and Los Angeles. Yes, "Funny Lady" definitely runs in the family.

SRB: You've mentioned that a love for food and cooking is also something that runs in your family. Many of Danielle's paintings incorporate fruits and vegetables (artichokes, hot peppers). How is Adele's creativity reflected in this passion for cooking?

DM: Cooking was another form of Adele's art, and her two young daughters happily submitted to her culinary expertise: a leg of lamb with a Middle Eastern theme or Julia Child's boeuf bourguignon. Sundays were banana pancakes and sausage days, and *The New York Times Cook Book* was her bible. We were foodies; she was a nurturer and cooking was a beautiful way for her to express her love for us. It was that simple.

EM: My mother loved to eat and loved to cook; cooking for her was an act of love and a creative act. In the '60s, when Danielle and I were little girls, she subscribed to the *Time-Life Foods of the World* book series. A glossy hardcover arrived each month, devoted to a specific country, culture, and cuisine and filled with travel anecdotes, photos, and recipes. Mom and Danielle and I would look at these books together, feeling transported to exotic locations around the globe. Sometimes we'd pick out a dish for her to cook, and we'd get to be her two little sous-chefs.

I remember being homesick my first year in college. Since Princeton was fairly close to Manhattan, I would often take the bus back to the city to spend the weekend with Mom. When

both Danielle and I went off to college, Mom had to downsize her apartment, going from a two-bedroom, with elevator and doorman, on East Seventy-Fifth and Lexington Avenue to an L-shaped studio apartment on the third floor of a funky brownstone walk-up. Still, I found nothing more comforting than hunkering down in her tiny apartment with its Pullman kitchen and pullout sofa bed on a cold winter night, watching old Bette Davis movies and chowing down on Mom's roast chicken with Pepperidge Farm stuffing. One of the things she taught me is what a deep joy and great pleasure it is to cook for the man in your life, the children you love, and the friends you cherish.

SRB: Tell me about Adele's life in Provincetown, when she rented places in the East End—among them, apartments at the Ice House, the Mermaid, and the Waterfront, known as "the Kibbutz."

DM: Adele shared Norman's love for Provincetown. Annually, she would slip into town, overlapping our summer stay with Dad by a week or two. She steered clear of Norman but managed to have a busy social life nonetheless. Her tribe included Paul Resika, Pat de Groot, Eldridge Mowry, and Suzanne Sinaiko, to name a few. She was still drinking in those days and known for her wild parties.

SRB: I heard about one memorable summer party that typified the bacchanalian flavor of late 1960s Provincetown. On one humid and likely full-moon July night, Adele gathered dozens of revelers, cranked up Miles and the Stones on the stereo, and served one of her Mideastern feasts. At high tide, nude partygoers jumped into the bay. When and how did Adele decide to stop drinking and become involved with Alcoholics Anonymous?

EM: Our mother's A.A. journey began in 1976, when I was sixteen and Danielle was eighteen. She felt her life had become unmanageable; even at home she couldn't live without two martinis every night. When she had plans to go out to a cocktail or dinner party, she would drink two martinis to warm up for more drinking later. At these parties, she got plastered. She'd make scenes, offend the host, storm out the door. She lost good friends and burned bridges. At a certain point, she bottomed out. One day she announced: "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." That is when she went into A.A., got herself a sponsor. Gradually, she stopped drinking.

Joining A.A. and doing the twelve-step work was a necessary, empowering turning point for Adele. It gave her a new lease on life and a new context in which to view herself and "The Past." It also reinvigorated her spiritual sense of life, of God, and of herself. Perhaps the most healing and liberating aspect to the program was the idea of doing a personal inventory: her tendency had been to blame everyone and everything else for her problems instead of taking responsibility. From the day she entered the program until the day she died, she never had a slip, never took a drink.



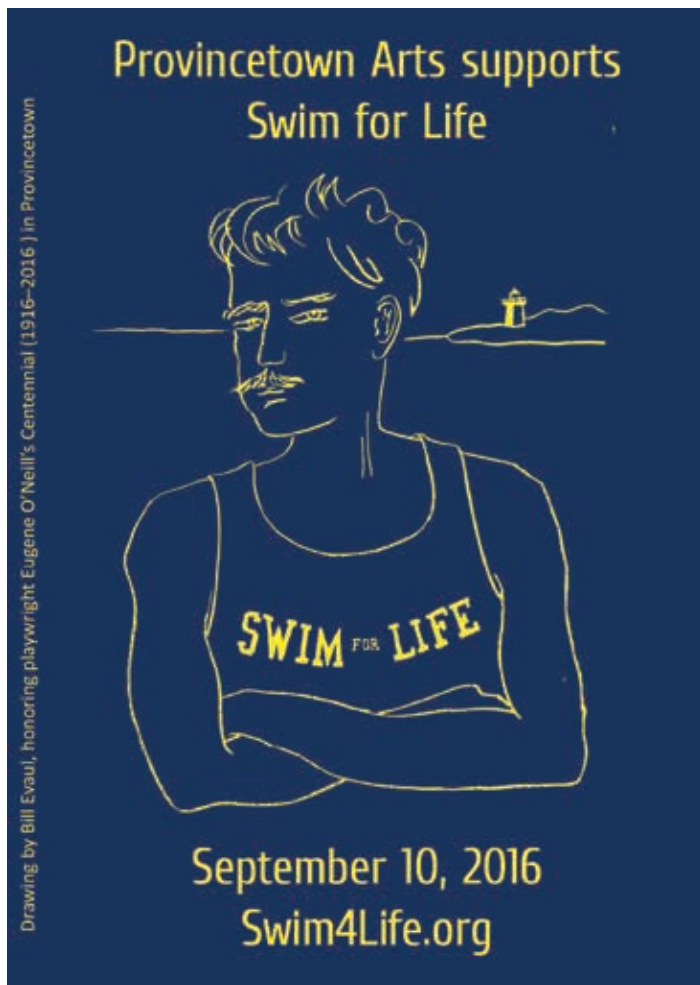
Drinking Days, 1985, oil on canvas, 18 by 12 inches

However, when she stopped going to A.A. meetings, Danielle and I witnessed her gradual unraveling, mentally and emotionally. To compound matters, our father's death in 2007 brought old wounds to the surface. And by 2010, she had dementia. Only when she lost her short-term memory did she also forget the traumas of her past. The dementia had a way of cauterizing her rancor and short-circuiting the pathways of obsession. She became a very mellow, benign, loving, and childlike person. This was the Adele we came to know in the end.

SRB: How did Norman and the family receive Adele's memoir?

DM: Mom thought her memoir would change her life, lift her out of her emotional and financial doldrums, legitimize her standing as more than just Norman's ex. It was heartbreaking to witness her disappointment. It was an accomplishment to write a memoir and get it published, especially given the hurdles my mother faced. The book had a brief flurry of activity and essentially died out.

Norman and the Mailer clan dismissed the book. Some were angry about her focus on the stabbing. Elizabeth and I were caught in the middle. Mom continued to be grandiose, believing it would be a best seller. There was mention of a movie and possibly a paperback. Nothing materialized and eventually she stopped hoping. However, she never lost her fierce pride over this final major feat. It was impossible for me to read the work in those days and determine its merit: it was too close, too painful, and there



was too much at stake. Now with her gone I can tentatively return to the pages and feel a swell of pleasure in recognizing her substantial talent as a writer.

EM: For Adele to write her memoir was a major vindication. Finally, she told her story after having endured thirty-five years of listening to, viewing, and reading other people's interpretations, accounts, and perspectives on "The Stabbing." Prior to writing her memoir, she felt she did not have a voice, that she was invisible. Her rage toward Norman had smoldered over many years, and sometimes it was not a quiet rage. My father was livid about her book. My mother was outraged but not surprised by his reaction. She was hurt by the rift now permanently between them. From the time Mom's book came out, she was no longer invited to Mailer holiday dinners or big parties at my father's Brooklyn Heights apartment. "I've been

excommunicated from the Mailer family," she said with anger, defiance, and a deep sadness.

She also stopped going to Provincetown, partly because she could not stand renting a little place just down the street from Norman and Norris Church Mailer. To me, the memoir was a profound reclaiming of her creativity and identity, in spite of the negative reaction to her book by Norman and the Mailer family.

SRB: Tell me about Adele's last days.

DM: As she settled into an assisted living facility, the jagged edges smoothed. In her dementia, her rage against our father vanished. She felt only love and conveniently forgot that he had five other wives and seven other children. "He is waiting for me," she said with confidence. "There was never anyone but me." My sister and I did not contradict her. With all the changes in her life, the one constant for Adele was the love she felt for, and the pride she took in, not only her two daughters but also her two granddaughters, Isabella, twenty-seven, and Christina, twenty-five, both writers.

With Mom gone, her vibration still seems to hover. Hardly a day goes by when I don't hear her voice. "Sweetie," she might say, standing over my shoulder while I paint, "why don't you try using a bit more black?" My sense of her as "tragic" has shifted; over a long journey she remained layered, complex, full of exploration, and always searching. She was, after all, an artist to the core.

EM: Yes, to echo my sister, our mother was an artist at the core. The last time I witnessed this was at the nursing home a few weeks before she died. An aide was moving her from wheelchair to bed. She was very frail. The aide grasped her under the armpits to hoist her onto the mattress. "Owwwww!" she shrieked. "Mom, are you okay?" I asked, rushing to her side. "Yes, yes, I'm okay, just a little sore, that's all. My scene partner and I were just doing a memory exercise and the actor went a little too far. But that's okay. The scene will be even better when we perform it tomorrow."

I did not contradict or correct her impression, but rather found something amazing in my mother's particular spin: here she was—weak, frail, confused, confined to a wheelchair in a nursing home. Yet in that moment, Adele transcended the prison of her current circumstances. She reinvented herself. She created what she needed, an alternative narrative that helped her make sense of what was happening. Hers was the artist's vision, able to transform ordinary experience into something extraordinary. ▀

SUSAN RAND BROWN has spent summers in her family's Commercial Street home since her teens, and began writing about the arts for the Provincetown Advocate in the late 1970s, covering local celebrities from painter Robert Motherwell and photographer Renate Ponsold to performers Wayland Flowers and Divine. She has since profiled many of the Outer Cape's major artists for Provincetown Arts and the Provincetown Banner, and is also a regular contributor to Art New England, covering Connecticut as well as the Outer Cape. "Mothers and Sons in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill" was the topic of her PhD dissertation.

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Dancing Draggers (Blessing of the Fleet), 2006, white-line color woodcut, 36 by 72 inches

Bill Evaul

WALKING THE WHITE LINE

By Ron Shuebrook

FOR MORE THAN THIRTY-FIVE YEARS, William Evaul has employed the white-line print tradition, an original technique, invented in 1915 in Provincetown by B. J. O. Nordfeldt and developed, now famously, by the Provincetown Printers, whose group included Blanche Lazzell, Agnes Weinrich, Ada Gilmore, Maude Squire, Ethel Mars, and Karl Knaths. In the late seventies, Evaul began researching and publishing essays on the artists of Provincetown. For the Pratt Institute's *Print Review 18* in 1984, he wrote an important article entitled "The Provincetown Print: Genesis of a Unique Woodcut Tradition," which contributed to a renewed interest in the white-line color prints by the Provincetown Printers, who continued to produce prints until the late twenties. (Lazzell was the only member of the original group who continued producing white-line prints until her death in 1956.) Evaul fastened on the fresh impulse of these early printmakers, arriving at his own ambitious level of original achievement, extending what had been a pragmatic process for the creation of intimate, inexpensive multiples into large-scale images of iconic power and formal coherence that sit comfortably in the expansive presence of much contemporary painting.

In the summer of 1915, B. J. O. Nordfeldt arrived in Provincetown to teach (with William and Marguerite Zorach) at the short-lived Modern School of Art. In addition to their own one-of-a-kind paintings, they also hoped to create less expensive prints. Unfortunately, there was no readily available press in town for the printing of editions of etchings, lithographs, or woodcuts. So, Nordfeldt adhered closely to the Japanese *ukiyo-e* (color) technique, including the use of an overlaying key block. This tradition, which dates back to the late eighteenth century, is one in which ink is generally applied to an image on a block on which a sheet of Japanese paper is carefully laid. To transfer the image to the paper,

pressure is applied by hand on the back of the paper, usually with a baren. The technique can accommodate great linear detail and complex color relationships. The "key block," which gave pictorial clarity to the overall design, was the final contrasting linear configuration that was overprinted on the mosaic-like composition of integrated and registered colored shapes cut from separate blocks.

Nordfeldt was aware that an innovative American educator and artist, Arthur Wesley Dow, had already been using the ukiyo-e method, exploring the creative potential of the woodblock print to transcend its use as a reproduction. Dow's goal was to apply this same

aesthetic to Western fine and decorative art, and to make that art available to a wide audience at a reasonable price, and he was particularly influential in emphasizing the role of color in printmaking. The combined influences of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the ukiyo-e process seem highly relevant to the planar compositions and the explorative color printing processes of the Provincetown Printers.

However, Nordfeldt soon departed from the ukiyo-e method. As Ada Gilmore Chaffee recalled: "Nordfeldt . . . became impatient with the mechanical labor of cutting so many blocks (one for each color) before he could express his ideas. One day he surprised the others by



Study for *Way Out Willie*, 1991, mixed media (charcoal, pastel, oil-stick, oil paint), 36 by 72 inches

exhibiting one block with his complete design on that, instead of parts being cut out of five or six blocks.”

This was the inspiration for the Provincetown Printers: Nordfeldt’s innovative technique of cutting a fine line around shapes so a number of different colors could be printed from the same woodblock. Although not a method by which identical copies can be easily achieved, the white-line design insures a linear structure against which nuanced color and spatial harmonies and contrasts can be improvised to startling pictorial effect. The creation of related, though variable, versions of a composition can purposefully suggest the potential for color to be an essential structural and emotional component in a fully realized artwork.

Given that most of the Provincetown Printers were also investigating the possibilities of abstraction derived from their observations and perceptions of the world around them, they recognized that this print process was well suited

to achieving their goals of creating coherent compositions comprised of clearly defined, flat planes of color, and other compatible visual elements. Informed by early modernist spatial investigations (as evident in paintings from Marsden Hartley to Pablo Picasso), these intimate interpretations of the environment and still-life arrangements attract the viewer’s attention as much for their inviting formal structure as for the familiarity of their chosen subjects.

From 1979 to 1980, Evaul was on assignment for the *Pratt Print Review* to investigate printmaking activity in Provincetown. At the time, there was little public memory about the Provincetown Printers, and the “marketplace” and the museum world had yet to rediscover them. He consulted Myron Stout, who had personally known some members of the Provincetown Printers and directed Evaul’s attention to their work. Because of Stout’s recommendations, Evaul first met Ferol Warthen. She was, perhaps, the only living artist in Provincetown

who had sustained the tradition at the time, and had actually “learned it from Blanche Lazzell.” These contacts were very useful to Evaul’s overall investigations into the history of printmaking in the town. When his research started to become known, Evaul was invited to lecture on the Provincetown Print by Marc St. Pierre, artist-teacher, at the Swain School of Design in New Bedford in 1980. This opportunity to speak about these little-known artists and the innovative printmaking process that they employed served as a crucial catalyst for Evaul’s own studio efforts, and he began to experiment with the possibilities of the white-line technique.

In 1982, Evaul showed his woodcuts for the first time in a two-person exhibition with Bruce McKain at the Eye of Horus Gallery. According to Evaul, Ferol Warthen attended the opening to see who was doing Provincetown Prints. They soon became good friends, and even gave a demonstration together at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. Warthen also



Nord (*Portrait of B.J.O. Nordfeldt*), 1990, white-line color woodcut, 15.5 by 13 inches



Mars and Squire (Orange), 2009, white-line color woodcut, 14.5 by 22 inches



Portrait of Blanche Lazzell, 1998, white-line color woodcut, 21.5 by 17 inches



Dancing Houses III, 2005, white-line color woodcut, 34 by 70 inches

pointed Evaul toward Robenia Smith, who had a modest collection of Provincetown Prints, images of which were used as the primary illustrations for his *Print Review* article when it was finally published in 1984.

At the same time, Evaul painted a large double portrait, *Mars and Squire (Orange)*, beginning his ongoing series of portraits of the historic Provincetown Printers. In this delightful woodcut, he creates internal movements that are generated by the horizontal positioning of the contrasting heads on an echoing ground. The overall structure seems to suggest the reverberating characters of these extraordinary women, Ethel Mars and Maud Hunt Squire, who had been friends of Gertrude Stein in Paris, and had actually been subjects of one of her stories. They were described as having “outlandish hairstyles and a unique artistic expression . . . [and they] contributed to Provincetown’s reputation as an appropriate place to express themselves.” It has also been written that they “led a life independent of man’s conventions. Unconventional too was the appearance of Mars, at least, for her hair was dyed purple and her lips were orange.” Bill Evaul’s affectionate double portrait implies something of the telling anecdotes that must have circulated around these stellar personalities. In subsequent versions of this print, Evaul has experimented with many other color schemes, including the 1986 composition in which he slyly referred to Matisse’s famous painting *Portrait of Madame Matisse/The Green Line* (1905).

Evaul has continued to make portraits in the suite *Homage to the Provincetown Printers*: Nordfeldt, Lazzell, Weinrich, Gilmore, and Oliver Chaffee, among others. *Portrait of Agnes Weinrich* (1990) imaginatively transforms the original source—a subtle black-and-white photograph that was reproduced in Ross Moffett’s seminal book *Art in Narrow Streets*—into planes of hues and tones that convey restrained movement alive in nuanced light. From 1985 through 2015, Evaul has made many different versions of this print in which fresh contrasts of color, texture, and pattern are improvised.

In *Portrait of Blanche Lazzell and Oliver Chaffee: Unlimited*, Evaul employs the styles of each

artist’s own work as departure points for his own inventive wit. Layered planes of warm gray, pink, pale blue, bluish red, ultramarine, purple, and lemon yellow interact in a manner reminiscent of Lazzell’s own Cubist-oriented vocabulary. Evaul has confidently distributed related hues across the surface to move the viewer’s attention from shape to shape, and to amplify the composition’s spatial organization. The pale blue, round lenses of the eyeglasses function as a center of attention, and add a hint of humor within a highly plastic improvisation. Similarly, his characterization of Oliver Chaffee brilliantly reflects this pioneer Modernist’s interest in Fauvist color relationships and mysterious, metaphoric configurations.

Complementing his studio production during this period, Evaul made other significant contributions to the community’s cultural life. He served as director/curator of several commercial galleries in Provincetown, as executive director of the Lower Cape Arts and Humanities Council from the early to mid-eighties, and as the director/curator of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum from 1986 through 1990. These many professional positions seem to have kept the accomplishments of other artists, both historic and contemporary, within his daily consciousness, while stimulating his own evolution as an artist.

In 1991, Bill Evaul completed his first truly large-scale white-line print, *Way Out Willie*, which addresses the theme of popular music. Measuring 34 by 70 inches, the print is the result of a process that began with several full-sized, mixed-media drawings that explored the narrative and formal demands of organizing a coherent composition of several groups of moving performers, as well as intervals of light, and gesturing figures in the audience. The resulting colorful print possesses an irrepressible energy that permeates both the surface of the picture plane and the images that inhabit the rhythmic, shallow space. Sensual figures and projections of golden light intensely charge the scene that emerges from the dark field, while sound and lighting equipment and frenzied fans frame the stage. *Way Out Willie* is a visual celebration that

conveys the collective emotion evoked by the best of live musical performances.

A few years ago, Evaul was invited by the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival to produce a suite of prints devoted to the life and plays of Williams. This summer, he is producing a suite that includes Eugene O’Neill, Susan Glaspell, and George Cram “Jig” Cook for the Provincetown Players Centennial—a centennial that represents the same summer that Nordfeldt helped the Players design some stage sets for a production of O’Neill’s *Bound East for Cardiff*. Decade by decade, Evaul’s work has evolved, absorbing cultural precedents infused with a lived awareness of their contemporary context. Like his predecessors, he sought and found a personally authentic path as an artist. ■

RON SHUEBROOK is a Canadian artist, a writer, an educator, and the former President and now Professor Emeritus of OCAD University, Toronto. Based in Guelph, Ontario, he is widely published, and regularly exhibits his art nationally and internationally, in more than sixty public and corporate art collections. He has been represented by the Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto, since 1978.

This essay was adapted from a longer essay by Ron Shuebrook, “Context and Continuity: The Art of William Evaul and the White-Line Print Tradition,” published in the catalogue for Evaul’s retrospective at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum in 2016.

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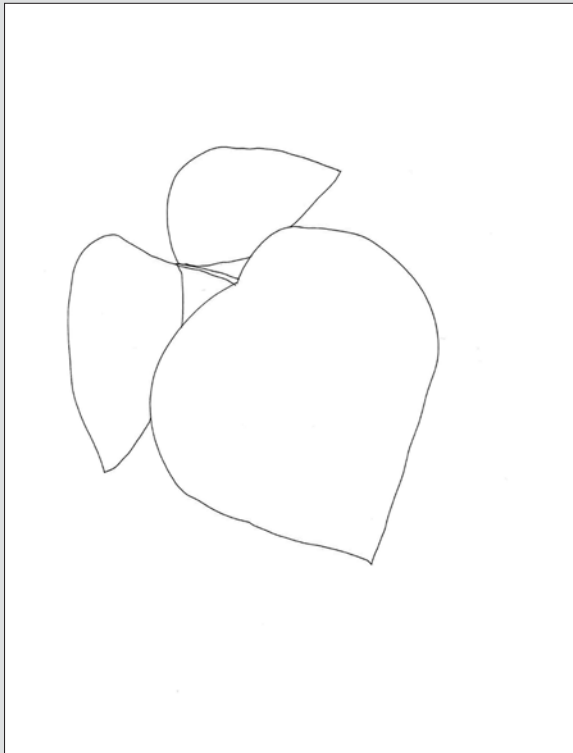
It's Time to Go

Text by Joanne Barkan, Art by Vicky Tomayko



It's Time to Go, 2015, monoprint with silkscreen and lithography, 5.25 by 7 feet

We can't stand here calmly beneath a tsunami
with sea waters rising and weather near balmy.
Where once we saw snow drifts and icy blue water,
now we're immersed in the colors that augur
something akin to a full-spectrum slaughter.
The world has gone mad as both polar caps shatter.
Maladaptation's a life-and-death matter.
So shake out your feathers, with babies in tow,
begin the Long Waddle. It's high time to go.



Ellsworth Kelly, *Three Leaves*, 1969, ink on paper, 29 by 23 inches

Ellsworth Kelly

By James Balla

I never met Ellsworth Kelly. I think that he was a quiet, focused person who created great art. Aware of, and immersed in all of the threads of art history, he sought something simpler and more personal, it seems. He found his subjects readymade in existing shapes and forms that he responded to. My own feelings about the importance of drawing to an artist are pretty strong, and one needs only to look at Kelly's incredible plant drawings to see a sublime example of hand and mind and form. An intense observation of nature combined with a sensibility that rejected embellishment produced some of the most remarkable drawings created in recent history. A great example to any working artist—staying true to his own ideas, hardworking and honest with integrity to his craft—Ellsworth Kelly has left us an exceptional body of work that will captivate people for ages to come. He created objects. If we are receptive, we can experience the spirit in the object, and the humanity that created it. And that is enough.

JOANNE BARKAN writes occasionally about art that she loves. Otherwise, she is a political essayist, an editorial board member of Dissent magazine, and the author of many books—in verse and prose—for young readers. She lives in Manhattan and Truro.

VICKY TOMAYKO is an artist, a teacher, and a former Fellow of the Fine Arts Work Center. She uses silk screen, lithography, and monotype to create one-of-a-kind works on paper. Her work—at once narrative, humorous, and edgy—can be seen at the Schoolhouse Gallery in Provincetown.

JAMES BALLA is an artist and co-owner of Albert Merola Gallery in Provincetown. A retrospective of his work, Into the blue again, was held in 2013 at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum.

Art in Eden

By Peter Hutchinson



Art in Eden, 2016, photo collage and text, 40 by 60 inches

Art in Eden
At the age of 16 I wrote to the famous plant expert Kingdon-Ward to get on one of his expeditions. I received an answer that he was away in the Himalayas to collect rhododendrons for introduction to the west and would not be back for six months. So I gave up on the idea and have for years concentrated on making my own garden of Eden, although without Adam & Eve, of course, but, yes, with a snake or two.
Peter Hutchinson 2016
40" x 60"

Big Loon

By Anna Poor

The pieces I'm working on (*Saints, Sinners, and Relics*) reference myths, art history, and iconography with an agnostic sensibility. It's a dark humor, in this time of religious frenzies and intolerance. The paintings of St. Sebastian loosely tied, standing on a stump, pierced with arrows, are powerfully sensuous (see: Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna, etc.) and have inspired me. I am embellishing the story of St. Sebastian to include an imaginary companion. A loyal bird, a loon (as in "crazy as a loon"), that is self-sacrificing and has bull's-eye targets on its body and is trying to run interference for St. Sebastian.

When I was a child, there was a character in the *Li'l Abner* comics called a shmoo, who would voluntarily jump into a frying pan to be consumed. A sacrificial lamb. I believe I may be a loon, but there's no proof.



Big Loon, 2016, ceramic, 18 by 4 by 3 inches

PETER HUTCHINSON was an early member of the Land Art movement, and later a cofounder of the Narrative Art movement of the 1970s, and has written on the influence of science fiction on art. (See *Dissolving Clouds*, published by Provincetown Arts Press.) Hutchinson has been a presence in the Provincetown art community since 1962 and has resided in Provincetown full-time since 1981.

ANNA POOR's most recent show was at La Galleria Maidoff, Florence, Italy. She is represented by Taylor/Graham Gallery in NYC and Sladmore Contemporary in London. She is teaching this summer at the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, where she was awarded the Joyce Johnson Chair.



Over the Years, Listening and Talking, with

Marie Howe

By Richard McCann

About the writing of the poem, she says: Don't hold back.

She says: Write into things. Shine a light into the underlit places.

About the writing of the poem, she says: The hard part is getting past the blah blah blah. Past the I think I think I think.

Once, one New Year's Eve in Provincetown, maybe in the late 1990s, a bunch of us were backing back home down Commercial Street in the snow. Mark Doty. Tony Hoagland. Maybe Nick Flynn. Marie. And me. The snow had started to fall while we were huddled in a restaurant, laughing and talking. As soon as we stepped out, we could feel the winds pick up. The snowstorm was turning into a blizzard.

We had to link our arms, just so we could make it down the street.

Then Tony called out, I know how each of you would write about this snow. He said: Mark, you'd see it as another sign of the transcendent.

One by one, Tony told all the rest of us, except Marie, how we'd write about the snow. I don't remember what he said to Nick. Or to me.

Hey, Marie said. What about me? How would I see the snow?

How would you see the snow? Tony said. Marie, you're the only one who'd see it as snow. You see the snow as snow.

Later that night, she whispered to me: Is that supposed to mean I'm stupid, that I see the snow only as snow? And then again, some years later, when we were in a café, recalling once more that snowy night, as from time to time we do, she said: The snow doesn't have to be a metaphor. Isn't the snow already brimming with the fullness of itself?

And then again, just a week or so ago, talking together on the phone: Maybe the snow is like

Heidegger, she says. *Vorhanden*. Objectively present. Present-at-hand.

Over the years, we have made an unintended habit of talking about poetry by talking about that snow.

She says: The things of the world don't need our language. Not in order to become more than what they already are.

I've never had a mentor, not as a writer, except maybe for Tillie Olsen, who used to tell me stories from her life. Walking back one night from a lecture about the stages of grieving, for instance, not long after her husband, Jack, had died, Tillie told me, "All this big talk about grieving—but when Jack was dying, I felt like I was falling in love with him all over again."

I've never had a mentor, that is, who taught me about writing by talking about craft.

But we've been talking now, Marie and I, for more than twenty-five years, since first meeting at the MacDowell Colony in June 1987. Not long after her arrival, she was summoned during dinner to the shared pay phone in Colony Hall to learn that she had just been selected by Margaret Atwood as a winner of the National Poetry Series for her first collection, *The Good Thief*.

And a few nights after that, she was summoned to the pay phone again, this time to learn that her brother John had been diagnosed with AIDS. John. Johnny. The younger brother whose dying she witnesses in such steady and unflinching detail in her book *What the Living Do*. Reading those poems,

with their pained and loving attentiveness, spoken in a plain language without swag, without increase or diminution, it's hard not to think of what Roethke wrote: "I recover my tenderness by long looking."

Most dinnertimes after that call, she sat in the cramped phone closet, talking with doctors or her family. I carried her dinner to her on a white china plate.

That was the summer I got sober, white-knuckling it alone in my studio in the woods, each day rewriting the single paragraph I'd managed to produce. Sometimes after dinner, Marie came to my studio to visit. Had we already recognized then what we'd become for each other later? The Irish-Catholic almost-twins, born less than a year apart. The good brother and the good sister, raised in semi-matching postwar suburban houses, with crucifixes and religious prints over the beds: "The Coronation of the Virgin," "The Light of the World." Somewhere—on the living room mantel, perhaps—prominently displayed: The Infant of Prague. Michelangelo's *Pietà*, the pierced, dead body of Christ cradled in his mother's lap. *Deo vobiscum. Adeste Fidelis*.

I asked her one afternoon at MacDowell if she wanted to take a car ride. No plan. No destination. We were both ready to escape ourselves for a while.

We drove west on NH-101, with Mount Monadnock in the distance, through small New Hampshire towns, Dublin, Marlborough, where the ponds and lakes—broad and flat and deep—hugged the roads. When we finally stopped at one, we removed our shoes and rolled up our pant legs before wading into the water.

For a while, we just stood there. I remember I wanted a drink, though I knew I couldn't have one. I looked at Marie, who was remembering that John had AIDS. Each of us more than a little shell-shocked. A little more than lost.

A passenger jet flew overhead, a small speck, bound to elsewhere.

Then Marie said: Here we are. Standing ankle-deep in silver water, with a jet flying overhead.

Yes, we're here, I thought. What more was there to say?

Years later, speaking of the poem, she says: It's in the silence between people where things occur.

She says: At the heart of the poem, there's always something that's unsayable. It's not unsayable because it's secret or taboo. It's unsayable because it can't be reduced.



(left to right) Martin Moran, Marie Howe holding her daughter, Grace Inan, Richard McCann, Donna Masini, and Tony Hoagland in Provincetown in 2003

Just Now

My brother opens his eyes when he hears the door click
open downstairs and Joe's steps walking up past the meowing cat

and the second click of the upstairs door, and then he lifts
his face so that Joe can kiss him. Joe has brought armfuls

of broken magnolia branches in full blossom, and he putters
in the kitchen looking for a big jar to put them in and finds it.

And now they tower in the living room, white and sweet, where
John can see them if he leans out from his bed which

he can't do just now, and now Joe is cleaning. What a mess
you've left me, he says, and John is smiling, almost asleep again.

—from *What the Living Do*

Once, Marie and our friend Michael came down to D.C. from New York to visit me in the hospital bed I'd been occupying for long time, recovering from my liver transplant surgery.

We come with gifts! Michael said, pulling shut the curtain that separated my bed from the one beside it.

They opened a plastic bag from which they began withdrawing the things they'd bought. A small papier-mâché mountain, fitted with a plastic tunnel through which an HO model train could pass. A string of white Christmas lights. A Plasticville farmhouse. A small box marked "HO Gauge Realistic Trees."

I closed my eyes, as they requested, so they could assemble it all before me.

A few minutes later, Michael said I could look.

And there it was, a tableau vivant, arranged atop my overbed hospital table: Into the papier-mâché mountain they'd stuffed the white Christmas lights, which glowed from deep inside the tunnel. Beside the tunnel, just a stone's throw, they had erected the tidy, yellow farmhouse. Beside the farmhouse, in two rows, they'd set the HO gauge trees.

"This is where we live together," Michael said.

"Yes," Marie said. "This is where we live together, by the illuminated tunnel, in the yellow farmhouse, with six realistic trees."

What was it she once told me? She said: Let the poem itself become the field of experience. It's not something you can figure out and then write.

Of the writing of the poem, she said: I want to capture what is irreducible. But the irreducible can't be wrought. It can only be held in the poem, this nest of words, a bit of time that's stilled but not stopped. ▀

RICHARD MCCANN is the author of Mother of Sorrows, a work of fiction, and Ghost Letters, a collection of poems. He is also the editor (with Michael Klein) of Things Shaped in Passing: More "Poets for Life" Writing from the AIDS Pandemic. His fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in such magazines as Ms., Esquire, Ploughshares, Tin House, the Atlantic, and the Washington Post Magazine, and in numerous anthologies, including The O. Henry Prize Stories 2007 and The Best American Essays 2000. He now lives in Washington, DC, where he teaches in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at American University.

This article was published in a slightly different form in the Honest Pint, a subscription series from Tavern Books edited by Matthew Dickman.

Marie

Marie Howe's Later Work

By Liz Rosenberg

MANY YEARS AGO, Marie Howe was attending a reading with a friend—she was then herself a schoolteacher, teaching high-school English—where the woman at the podium declared that she was writing her “spiritual autobiography.” *I want to do that*, Marie whispered to her friend. She has been writing it ever since.

Marie Howe's first book of poems, *The Good Thief*, selected by Margaret Atwood for the National Poetry Series and published in 1988, made something of a splash in the literary world. A few things set Howe's early work apart. She had a clear, straightforward voice, of a kind no one had ever quite heard before—a way of seeming almost matter-of-fact, almost prosaic, a method of laying out her lines against the traditional mode, as if laying down sentences, but carrying such deep music that there could never be a question of whether this work should have been prose or verse. And there was her subject matter—especially in poems about child abuse—which detonated its power like a slow-moving atom bomb. This combination of voice and subject matter set Marie Howe's work in a class of its own, and in a modest way she gained devoted fans.

This slight notoriety—for reputation in poetry is generally slight, even at its most hectic—was further reinforced when in 1998, nearly a decade after her first book, Howe published *What the Living Do*. Much of that book centers on the death of her brother, a loss described in such exquisite beauty and honesty that the book of poems has been compared both to memoir and to a novel, poetry's powerhouse brethren. The title poem alone has been reprinted and cited thousands of times; it may well be one of the most highly regarded lyric poems of the twentieth century.

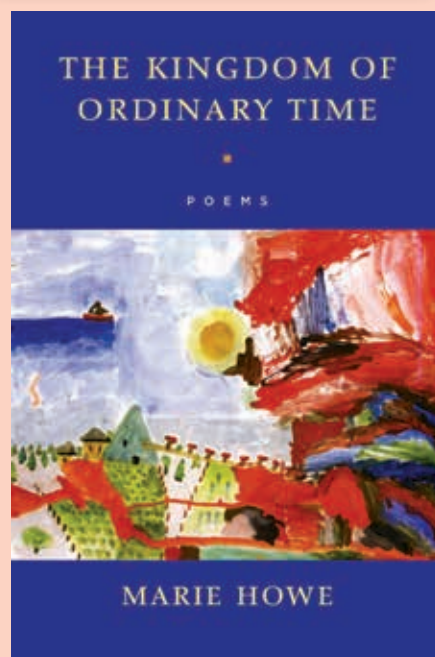
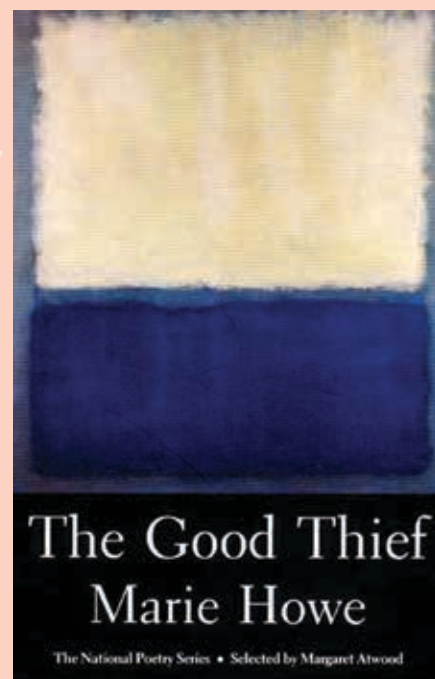
So it would have been a simple matter for Howe to rest on her laurels, repeat her past techniques, and do as many other poets have done—in effect, imitate herself for the rest of her life. She chose instead to resist every easy opportunity. I know of only one other living poet who has set her face quite so defiantly against easy fame, and that is Carolyn Forché. Like Forché, Howe took a long time between volumes of poetry. She waited another ten years after *What the Living Do* to produce her next book, *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* (2008), and she hasn't rushed to follow up that volume, either. (Recent poems published in periodicals and performed at readings prove that her work continues to grow in startlingly beautiful leaps and bounds.) *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* is not novelistic; it does not reiterate old material.

Instead, it moves forward Howe's initial poetic impulse—to craft a spiritual autobiography, an autobiography of the soul.

The book begins with a prologue that is and isn't about religion (“*One loaf = one loaf. One fish = one fish.*”) and is and isn't about politics (“*The so-called Kings were dead. // . . . the men who'd hijacked the airplane prayed where the dead pilots had been sitting.*”). It takes place in what Howe calls “Ordinary Time.” In the kingdom of ordinary time, one must create the holy—and miracles are more likely found on the kitchen table than in loaves turned into fishes. Indeed, the very first poem following the prologue is a poem called “The World”—this will be the locus of the terrible and the wonderful; this is our battlefield and playground. We live here in a state of confusion that Matthew Arnold described in “Dover Beach,” or, as Howe declares at the outset: “I couldn't tell one song from another, / which bird said what or to whom or for what reason.” Yet the problem is not so much our lack of knowledge in the face of fathomless space and stars, but our own inattention, “when, most nights, I didn't look.”

Looking leads to awareness, and awareness to the even more discomfiting call of compassion. In “The Star Market,” the poor, the lame, and the halt of biblical times are all around us now, as hard to love now as they ever were. “The people Jesus loved were shopping at The Star Market yesterday,” Howe reminds us, “The feeble, the lame, I could hardly look at them: / shuffling through the aisles, they smelled of decay, as if The Star Market // had declared a day off for the able-bodied.” Here we get a glimpse into Howe's genius, for she doesn't stop at the shuffling, she gives us not only the sight but the smell of decay, and then makes a joke about it, and the joke cements the scene in our minds, nails it into place. Most poets would let up and let go more easily; Howe is relentless and therein lies her greatness.

I think no poems in *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* are more powerful than the ones that turn to the reader with a barbed question. One is “Would You Rather,” which asks the reader, would you rather be the “woman shot running with her two children” or the “child, / running / behind her, shot too” or “the soldier who shot





Marie with Inan, Christmas 2004



Inan and Marie, 2016

and bayoneted the baby when he got there?" This corner of the world is nature red in tooth and claw; we can look neither to the animal world nor to ourselves for safety. The capacity to kill or be killed is always inside us, Howe argues, and she follows this with a poem about an argument over the nature of love, "After the Movie." A friend says "he believes a person can love someone / and still be able to murder that person. // I say, No, that's not love. That's attachment." But in the middle of this philosophical debate comes my favorite moment in the poem, one of my favorite moments in the book:

Michael and I stand on the corner of 6th Avenue saying goodnight.
I can't drink enough of the tangerine spritzer I've just bought—

again and again I bring the cold can to my mouth and suck the
stuff from
the hole the flip top made.

What a crazy moment! And how strangely the penultimate line slithers into the last, like bubbles escaping from the soda can—and yet, isn't this how we experience our lives? Thirst, in the middle of a debate, sweetness right in the midst of bitterness? Howe's poems don't just discuss the impossible contradictions of living in the world—they embody them.

The second poem that turns its laser beam on the reader is perhaps the centerpiece of the book, "What We Would Give Up," and it is a prose poem, written in a deliberately conversational style. It begins with the poet reporting on a college class she'd visited, asking the students, "What would we be willing to give up to equalize the wealth in the world?" (Note the *we* of the question. If we are implicated, so is the poet.) The answers come pouring in fast: malls, supermarkets, imported fruit—and, flip-pantly, "A car, the guy with the nose ring said, I don't have a car anyway."

Howe then digresses—or appears to digress—to a long anecdote about her broken phone that week, the inconvenience of it, the dozens of calls trying to get the problem solved, but she is winding up like a mighty pitcher for this final paragraph:

Would I give up the telephone? Would I give up hot water?
Would I give up makeup? Would I give up dyeing my hair?
That was a hard one. If I stopped dyeing my hair everyone
would know that my golden hair is actually gray, and my long
American youth would be over—and then what?

Galway Kinnell once wrote that part of poet Stanley Kunitz's greatness lay in his willingness to show himself in a weak or foolish condition, as he does most famously as a slapped child in "The Portrait." Howe,

who worked with Kunitz closely and early on, who called him her "true teacher," has inherited her mentor's ability to reveal her vulnerability—her vanity in "What We Would Give Up," her greed in sucking at the can of orange spritzer in "After the Movie." Never, I think, does she show it more bravely and beautifully than in relation to her daughter, Grace Yi-Nan, to whom this book is dedicated.

Again and again, the daughter teaches the parent how to be. Again and again, we fail to learn the lesson. In "Non-violence 2," the daughter doesn't like the fly buzzing around her cereal bowl but remembers an earlier conversation with her mother:

but we had a talk about the ants yesterday, so she says,
The fly is alive, and I am alive, and covers her bowl

with a dish towel which she lifts a little every minute or so
so she can slip in her spoon.

(Note the *so* followed immediately by *so*: again, Howe is breaking the common rules—this is how we really think and speak.) But the mother, six hours later, wants "to murder that fly—landing on my arm / on my knee—want to find a book and flatten it."

Sometimes the child becomes a mirror of the parent: look into that mirror at your peril, and be sure you like what you see. In the poem "Hurry," Howe describes a typical day, feeling harassed, running errands with her daughter. "Hurry up honey, I say, hurry, hurry," till finally, when the errands are all run, she tells the girl:

you walk ahead of me. You be the mother.

And, Hurry up, she says, over her shoulder, looking
back at me, laughing. Hurry up now darling, she says,
hurry, hurry, taking the house keys from my hands.

In "Fifty," toward the end of *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*, Howe writes, almost offhandedly, "The soul has a story that has a shape that almost no one / sees." But one sees it in her poetry again and again, the beautiful autobiography of a beautiful and evolving soul. ❧

LIZ ROSENBERG is a poet and novelist, most recently of *The Moonlight Palace*. She has also published more than twenty award-winning books for young readers, including *What James Said*. She teaches English and Creative Writing at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Marie

By Michael Klein

WHEN I MET Marie Howe more than twenty years ago—in Staten Island, of all places—we were both single people who smoked cigarettes. And then, some years later, we both married people and Marie adopted a beautiful girl from China and, in the meantime, also wrote two more luminous books of poetry that seem—like all her work—to hold living and dying in the same hand. You always secretly want to love the writing of people you know, as much as you love them apart from the writing, and luckily for me (and lots of other people), Marie is someone whose poetry and personhood are almost indistinguishable. Except for, maybe, when it comes to being funny—which she is, in person—even though she has written some poems that I might not call funny but might call *sly*.

I first heard about Marie Howe in 1988 or '89 from Jean Valentine because I was putting together an anthology of poems that faced the AIDS pandemic called *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to AIDS*, and Jean had heard Marie read some work written about her brother John, who died from AIDS, and thought she would be a great person to add to the reading for the anthology that I was organizing at Snug Harbor in Staten Island.

But actually, Marie and I were together before Staten Island, without knowing each other—in the same room one night for another reading at Harvard-Epworth church in Cambridge that had been organized by Gail Mazur and Martha Collins around *Poets for Life* and, if I'm remembering this right, Marie was supposed to go to a Stanley Kunitz reading but stayed in Cambridge (where she lived) instead for our anthology celebration because she needed to hear what other people were saying and writing about AIDS. So there we were, already, starting to follow each other's lives without ever saying a word to each other.

Marie is one of those rare human beings who lives in the complex and, at times, shattering announcement of surprise. By that I mean, she is so engaged with her interior world while living in the beautiful and treacherous world we all live in that it makes spending time with her feel crucial. She's brilliant—you can tell in the first five minutes of any encounter with her—but she's also fiercely compassionate about the universe of poetry, not merely in whatever writing ability a poet may have to eke out some sort of career, but also about poetry's abiding nature to make community *off the page*. The community of poetry. Her idea, her mission, has always been to make poetry as large and vibratory in the public discourse as it can be, much more than, merely, one poet talking to a reader.

I once did an interview with Marie that never got published (which I, for one, regret because I think she said some important things that she's never said before—like, *there should be another word for poetry so more people will come to it*). A lot of that interview actually had to do with the theater (which we both love). “The great plays,” Marie said that day, “are the ones where we don't feel like we're watching, but are actually participating in some way.” And that participation for Marie, I think, also must include living in the face of someone's dying. One poem of hers about her brother John, “The Last Time,” looks at that situation in the most completely lucid and yet unexpected way:

The last time we had dinner together in a restaurant
with white tablecloths, he leaned forward

and took my two hands in his hands and said,
I'm going to die soon. I want you to know that.

And I said, I think I do know.

And he said, What surprises me is that you don't.

And I said, I do. And he said, What?

And I said, Know that you're going to die.

And he said, No, I mean know that you are.

Marie Howe lives in both the question and the answer of that poem. And I've been one of the lucky ones who has been able, after all these years, to say that she has taught me both what the question means and why the answer matters. ✨

MICHAEL KLEIN's most recent book of poetry and prose is *When I Was a Twin*. He is a five-time Lambda Literary Award finalist and has won the award twice. He teaches at Hunter College in New York and in the MFA Program at Goddard College in Vermont and is on the online and Summer Workshop writing faculty of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.



(l to r) Nick Flynn, James Shannon, Marie Howe, Michael Klein, and Michael Landis, Christmas 1997, Provincetown



(l to r) James Shannon, Victoria Redel, Marie Howe, Martin Moran, Donna Masini, Michael Klein, Nancy Hechinger, 2015, NYC



PHOTO BY VICTORIA REDEL

The fox sleeping

Four Blessings with Marie

By Victoria Redel

1. IT'S 1990, NEW YORK, St. John the Divine. I run into Marie at the Blessing of the Animals. The church is jammed with people and the wild array of pets. She's standing by a massive stone column, deep in conversation with a friend. We know one another just a little bit—New Hampshire, Columbia University, Provincetown. We keep winding up in the same places, not exactly at the same time and not enough to have things we've shared, but enough for us to have noticed one another. Certainly, I've noticed her. "Have you met my friend Nick?" Marie asks after she gives me a warm hug. "You two poets should meet." I'm at the Blessing of the Animals with my one-year-old, my husband. Schlepping a stroller, diaper bag, I feel dumpy with motherhood and hanging on to poetry by a thread. I hardly feel like anyone a poet might want to meet.

The three of us talk and laugh. About the Fine Arts Work Center. About what we're reading. Nothing super-serious. Yet, as Marie laughs and asks questions, suddenly, she's not someone across the room, a distant presence. She's here, present, entirely present, and I understand that she wants, even expects, everyone to be part of a great adventure where friendship and poetry help shape a more hospitable world. It all makes some obvious sense to her that, given the chance, no one would miss out on an opportunity to deepen the personal and collective imagination, to be part of the conversation. When I walk back to my family, I'm less frayed and oddly deeper inside community. Meanwhile, beloved cats and parakeets, Great Danes and murky bowls of guppies, are brought forward to be blessed. What has happened? Nothing has happened. And everything. The friendship has begun.

2. IT'S 2014, NEW YORK, Grand Central Station. Marie has collected a wide-ranging tribe of poets

(she'll do it again the next year in a subway station in the city financial district). We're seated at desks with only a stack of paper, a typewriter, a lamp, and a three-minute egg timer. Above us in bold calligraphy on a banner: *The Poet Is In*. The plan is that strangers—rushing through the busy train station—will actually take the time to sit down with a poet, divulge little bits of their lives; out of this brief intimate conversation, the poets—used to fastidious, private composition—will flip over the egg timer and bang out a poem to sign and hand out as a gift.

It all seemed more than a little improbable. The station's busy traffic. Poets' fussy, slow, and private process. But it made clear-as-the-day sense to Marie. Marie understands that people are thirsty for art and for communion. And, indeed, over the next two days people patiently wait two hours in line for their very own poems. There's serious conversation, rollicking whoops of laughter, tears. And hundreds of three-minute poems are written and shared. And when a poet asks a stranger, "Tell me what image you see when the door of your mind opens," a woman will say, "I see my brother on the shore of the small river in a village in Guatemala." Or a man sits down and with urgency says, "Please, I need a poem to win my wife back."

3. "OKAY, CAN I RUN something by you?" Marie asks on the phone this morning. And later I call back to say, "I need to tell you something." Or Marie asks, "Can we take a walk?" Or I call and say, "I had the weirdest dream last night." Or Marie says, "I'm reading an astonishing book," and I say, "I'm going start reading right now." Or we ask one another what we're cooking for dinner. Or we cook dinner together for friends. Or she says, "What is the right curfew for a fourteen-year-old?" Or we run by one another a thousand mother concerns. Or I say, "I'm afraid I'm dying." And she laughs, "Honey, I'm just

suggesting that's a panic attack." Or we go for a manicure and pedicure. Or we read a passage aloud from Rilke on Rodin. Or we recall where we each were when we first read C. K. Williams's *Tar*. Or we tell each other what was going on in our lives that day we spoke in St. John the Divine. Or we worry about the work of a student. Or worry about another student who's suffering. Or I say, "Will you have a look at these pages and see if there's anything?" and Marie says, "Will you look at this and see if there's anything?" And then, later, there's always another story one of us needs the other to know.

4. ONCE, IN A KITCHEN in Provincetown, Marie says, "Hey, Vik, look." And we watch out the window as a fox saunters up the back staircase, curls up on the stair landing, and naps goldenly in the soft afternoon light. We stand together in awe, looking out the window at the fox who is just on the other side of the door. We're barely speaking. None of our kids are with us, and though we already know we'll describe to them the fox's red coat, we're glad now to be quiet, not needing to say much to one another, just watching her dark lashed eyes open and close, the pulse of her wet nose. We can't take our eyes off of her. She sleeps, protected, out of the way on a back staircase. After a while—half an hour?—the fox stretches up and slinks down past the trash cans, disappearing into yard scrub. Over the next months, when we're talking about some pressing life concern, the conversation often twists back to the kitchen, the scrubbed afternoon Cape light, and we remind one another about that blessing, that visitation of fox. ▀

VICTORIA REDEL is the author of three books of poems and four books of fiction, with a new novel forthcoming next year. Victoria was a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center, teaches in the summer program, and is a member of the FAWC writing committee.

Marie

By Paul Lisicky

THE MOVIE STAR too smart for Hollywood. A priest, but an especially progressive priest: what would the church do with such a sexy priest? Your open, funny, trustworthy friend, the friend you come to in time of crisis. All these characters simultaneously. A community inside her, around her. Marie.

And yet?

A mistake to mythologize Marie, as Marie is always ready to demolish mythology in her person, her teaching, her poetry. No hierarchies for her. She will keep you on your feet as she keeps herself on her feet. Try to anoint her and she'll hold up her hand. Don't do that to me, she'll say gently, but forcefully.

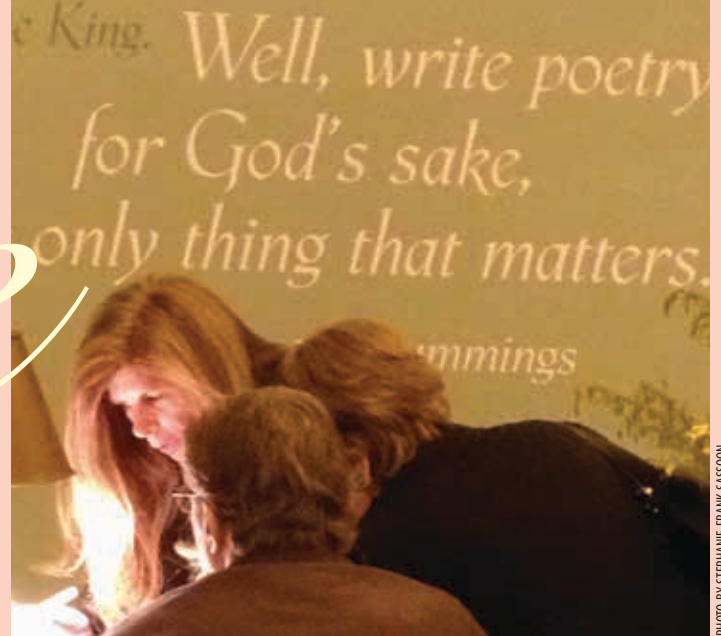
All I can say is I was having a hard time. I knew right away to call Marie, to come to her. She sat me down in her kitchen. She didn't ask anything from me, didn't bask in the intimacy of my hurt. She handed me an ice-cold glass of seltzer. She cut up a watermelon. She listened: a kind of active, sane, compassionate listening that quite literally saved my life.

Which is another way to describe her poems, her brilliant poems. Sure, any poet's work is an attempt to transcribe an inner life, but Marie's work goes above and beyond in its listening. She animates her poetry with that listening. She makes a space for down-to-earthness, for mystery. She wants them to sit side by side at the table. But there are other traits in the room too: the texture of the human voice, its pauses and cadences; the miracle of good sex; the relationship between absurdity and grace, which are never as far apart as we've been led to believe. Her poetry respects difference but it's not afraid to lean into difference, as you would into the shoulder of someone you might like to get to know. I can't say enough about its ongoing work. We're so lucky. ❧

PAUL LISICKY is the author of five books, including *The Narrow Door* and *Unbuilt Projects*. He teaches in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Rutgers University-Camden. His awards include a 2016 Guggenheim Fellowship.



(l to r) James Shannon, Paul Lisicky, Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Inan (on Marie's lap), Mark Adams, Richard McCann, Donna Masini, Jason Shinder, and Martin Moran



Howe at *The Poet Is In*, Grand Central Station, 2014

PHOTO BY STEPHANIE FRANK SASSOON

By Stephanie Frank Sassoon

MEETING MARIE WAS like finding a part of myself I didn't know I was missing. We met in October of 1983 at the Fine Arts Work Center. She was writing in studio #3, I was painting in #5, and between us, in #4, was the insistent tapping of Maureen McCoy's typewriter—I think she was writing a story about Elvis. I don't know quite when it happened or how, but there was an instant recognition, and the kind of relief one feels in the soul when one is finally at home.

I remember that Marie's eyes sparkled, as if holding a secret, and her hair was a gorgeous wild mane; she could lace her knee-high boots with one hand in the blink of an eye, throw together dinner without fussing, and write elegant poetry that was magnificent and devastating at once.

Early mornings, we'd walk on the beach behind Commercial Street, sipping coffee, smoking cigarettes, talking or not talking, trying to understand yearning, desire, pain, solitude, and companionship. There were dinners of many, crowded around a small table, in Marie's room or mine. Stanley commenting that of course the light in Provincetown was glorious—we were fifty miles out at sea—or speculating that the first human song was probably a lullaby.

The friendship Marie and I forged over those seven months at the Work Center is to this day the one closest to my heart. There were long periods in the years following our Fellowship when we lost touch, and then there would be a letter, or a phone call. As though connected in some invisible realm, we would be reading, studying, thinking about the same thing—Moses, or Mary Magdalene, or Rumi—and would reconnect.

Some years ago, Marie sent me a draft of "Once or Twice or Three Times, I Saw Something"—from "Poems from the Life of Mary" in *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*—just at a moment in my painting life when I was grappling with the edges of things: inner-outer, what is real, or seen, or invisible. This poem was both comforting (in the midst of my struggle) and inspiring, and it continues to speak to a series of paintings I've been working on for eight years now.

"If you could take one piece home from this room, which would it be?" This is the game we love to play at a gallery or museum, as we go backward through an exhibit to make sure we have chosen well the piece to hold in our hearts and minds. "This one because of the light," or "This one because of the quiet," and "Who is that person whose face is sticking out of that cloak anyhow?" Questions lead to more questions, and books, pictures, stories, music, films. Sharing with Marie is endlessly enriching, and there is never enough time. ❧

STEPHANIE FRANK SASSOON is a former Fine Arts Work Center and Guggenheim fellow and grantee of the NEA and Massachusetts Council on the Arts. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, and teaches art at St. Ann's School.

Holding the In-between of It

By Sophie Cabot Black

I HAVE HEARD the following said of Marie Howe:

“Marie Howe could read a phone book and somehow make it poetry.”

“Marie is one of the most generous humans put on the earth.”

“She is like a preacher, a priestess of our souls.”

Over the years, I’ve found all of these statements to be true, starting when Marie and I first met, and I was a nervous little sister in my first year of a big MFA program, and Marie was a seasoned second-year. She was wise, gently firm, and beautiful. Our first workshop together was with C. K. Williams, and it was an astonishing experience being surrounded by all this paying attention to words (I had not taken workshops in college). But C. K. Williams was not easy, and Marie helped me navigate, in her way, by reminding me to keep my chin up and just keep pushing away at what I do best. To own my velvet, my leaves in the wind, my full moon: I was not the only one in the class who benefited from Marie’s quiet intercessions toward keeping one’s own voice one’s own.

It was during this time that she shared “Part of Eve’s Discussion” with all of us. This small amazing piece was daring, and fresh, and, finally, real. And too, for me, it was about poetry, the work of poetry. And this poem (I would argue) was the best piece that came out of that entire MFA program in those years, and later became our introduction to Marie Howe when it opened her iconic first book, *The Good Thief*.

This first poem, this first book, has not stopped holding its power. The place between dread and faith, the in-between of it, is exactly the poet’s job: to keep us there. Marie exudes this ability to hold us, and then to not let this place go. Moreover, she will not name this “it,” which is a place where most other writers would not be brave enough to be silent. But she lets the in-between work for her. It’s probably a way to survive, and oh how we benefit.

After our time at Columbia, I lost Marie to the wilds of the world outside New York City. It was a difficult time for me, but during Marie’s Fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, we were in telephonic touch, and supported each other through great personal turmoil. Then, after I helped her move into poet-laden Cambridge and a few months had passed, I told her of how lonely I was without

her presence in New York. She too was lonely: though surrounded by wonderful male counterparts, she ended up looking around each corner for a poetess (perhaps one with hair to match hers). And indeed she found her: Lucie Brock-Broido, who lived not far from Linnaean Street. Our thrice-mutual mentor, Stanley Kunitz, paired them up and quickly our trio began.

Meantime, Marie suggested I initiate a relationship with someone she had met in New York, the bespectacled Jason Shinder, who at the time had begun a reading series at the West Side Y. I had already met him once, with Sam Kashner, a fellow student at Columbia, but hadn’t realized the connection. And so at Columbia MFA’s good-bye party for Stanley Kunitz, I mistook Jason for a handsome Richard Belzer, and we walked all the way downtown, talking nonstop, instantly fast and furious friends.

As Marie had grown even closer to Stanley, she went often to Provincetown to visit him, and we too came along, or met her there, or would drive with Stanley up to his place, and soon enough this became a repeated ritual. We got to help with weeding or pruning, or we’d just sit and listen. And also talk (a bit), and drink (one or two martinis, which for me is a lot), and gossip. Also, an audience was often shared with Elise Asher, Stanley’s third wife. It was an interesting navigation for all of us, her presence, her sometimes interrupting, commenting, unmistakable voice. Stanley loved being surrounded by us, and we loved being with him. We each had our private time with him, but when we were all together, it felt like a tribe, just as he called it: some motley crew shipwrecked out on the wintry edge of a mostly abandoned Provincetown. The comfort to be found in those moments was unparalleled, and there seemed a remarkable absence of ambition between us—though there was the occasional poetry scandal.

Instead, we probed for stories. I even tried to tape them sometimes, but too often got

Part of Eve’s Discussion

It was like the moment when a bird decides not to eat from your hand, and flies, just before it flies, the moment the rivers seem to still and stop because a storm is coming, but there is no storm, as when a hundred starlings lift and bank together before they wheel and drop, very much like the moment, driving on bad ice, when it occurs to you your car could spin, just before it slowly begins to spin, like the moment just before you forgot what it was you were about to say, it was like that, and after that, it was still like that, only all the time.

—from *The Good Thief*

caught. One unfortunately un-taped moment was one when Marie insisted Stanley was more on top of current pop culture than even the rest of us; he was, at the time, eighty-five or so. We pushed back and so she was determined to prove us wrong, and at one point when we were all together she asked Stanley if he knew who Michael Jackson was. Not only did he know, but he then proceeded to make a couple of dance moves in imitation.

Marie has faith in so much, and it follows her wherever she goes. She seems always at the moment just before revelation, but then she also holds that moment, herself, too. You can find her there, tending to someone who wants to know more about words and what they can do. Jason, Stanley, myself, countless others, read her, listen to her, and we are changed. ✨

SOPHIE CABOT BLACK has three poetry collections from Graywolf Press, *The Misunderstanding of Nature*, *The Descent*, and, most recently, *The Exchange*. Her poetry has appeared in numerous magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Republic*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Paris Review*. She currently teaches at the *Ninety-Second Street Y* in New York.

Howe

The How of the What

By Christopher Busa

MARIE HOWE, who was raised in a Catholic family with eight brothers and sisters—her birth order is number two—is now herself the mother of sixteen-year-old Grace Yi-Nan, whose nickname is “Inan.” She adopted her daughter when Inan was three, traveling to China with James Shannon, her partner of eight years and later her husband. They were newly divorced, but he became Inan’s godfather. They were newly divorced, but he became Inan’s godfather. When I arrived at Marie’s cozy neighborhood, tucked in a quiet block in New York’s West Village, Inan was busy being tutored by a bright-eyed young man in Marie’s own writing studio, another small apartment two floors below her fifth-floor living quarters. Marie and I disappeared upstairs and settled into a light-infused room where we could discuss her life and poetry in an atmosphere inflected with Howe’s strong memories of her formative years in Provincetown as a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center.

A double-hung doorway, fabricated from old planks found in Provincetown, salt-saturated, sea-beaten, and seasoned by strong sun and stormy weather—the creation of Provincetown artist James Manning—gave off a feeling that Marie and I shared a common cocoon in our affection for a tiny place with vast impact. We sat side by side on a gauze-covered couch. Between us was a low, foot-square tin-topped table, its surface puckered with pound marks, also fabricated by Manning. Our teacups tottered as we talked. A lacy white veil was draped over a TV screen, as if it were a valuable painting being protected from sunlight. Marie explained that she avoids being stared at by a blank screen, that she only watches movies on Netflix, and has no hookup to television channels. On the opposite wall, two narrow bookshelves ran floor to ceiling, jammed with books by Joseph Brodsky, Derek Walcott, Stanley Kunitz, and other poets close to Marie’s heart. She mentioned that most of her books are in her office at Sarah Lawrence College, where she teaches, or in her writing studio in the apartment below, where Inan was laboring over her geometry lessons.

Slender, strikingly attractive, with long, flowing hair, which she tosses like the mane of a horse, Marie Howe is among the coterie of female poets that Elise Asher, the wife of Stanley Kunitz, called the “hair-tossers,” including Lucie Brock-Broido, Cleopatra Mathis, Victoria Redel, and Sophie Cabot Black, each of whom had taken poetry workshops with Kunitz. In her most recent book, *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*, Howe dedicated a poem, “The Spell,” to Asher. Elise Asher was a poet who published a volume titled *The Meandering Absolute*; she became a highly original artist, painting mythological scenes on Plexiglas, using a technique of linear abstraction reminiscent of the “white writing” of Mark Tobey. Like the trail of a snail, Asher’s line followed a meandering path, with semantic loops across her themes of nonsense, innocence,



Marie Howe, 1997, from the *Bad Behavior* series PHOTO BY BILL HAYWARD

and visionary imagination. She was haunted by passages in poems that made her conscious of her own mortality.

In a profile published in *Provincetown Arts* in 1992, Asher recalled how she had asked her father, after her mother died, “How can you think about not thinking?” She wondered how you could know you weren’t knowing. This is the subject of Howe’s poem, in which her daughter, then only four years old, senses something is wrong with her mother’s abstracted mood:

Yesterday, she climbed into the backseat and said, Mom
tell me your story, and I did what I always did:

I said I dropped you off
taught my class, had lunch, returned e-mails, talked with
students. . . .

And she said, No Mom, tell me the whole thing.

And I said, ok. I feel a little sad.

And she said, Tell me the whole thing Mom.

And I said, ok Elise died.

On the drive home, Howe sees, in her rearview mirror, her daughter in the backseat, gazing sideways out the window, “where,” Howe writes, “they say the unlive life is.” Her poem is a picture of the magic in thinking, in which the simple telling is its own metaphor. Embodied real witnesses are caught in an unconscious revelatory moment, an understanding that jolts across a generation. Howe concludes the poem with a contrast between the mother, looking backward and forward about the loss of Elise, and the child, staring sideways into the future mystery of her own life.



Before the Beginning

Was I ever virgin?

Did someone touch me before I could speak?

Who had me before I knew I was an I?

So that I wanted that touch again and again
without knowing who or why or from whence it came?

Magdalene at the Theo-poetics Conference

Yes, the scholar said, but why ask your students
to write these close observations?

What use is it to notice the rusted drainpipe?

Or the young woman asleep in the library
her head resting on her folded arms?

Why should they look inside the petals of the purple
tulip
to the yellow pollen-coated stamen?

Or under their beds to where the dust has collected?

Epilogue

(for Billy Forlenza)

if this line is the beginning I might be . . .

If there is no beginning ok then
no end

I would be grass?

The I the I the me me me What use
has it been? somebody loved me
Somebody left Bones Ash

Whatever flooded into the world when
Billy died that then
the moonlit path over the un-walkable water

forthcoming in *Magdalene*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2017

Among Howe's courses in the MFA program at Columbia University was Joseph Brodsky's class, which focused on the close reading of other poets. The class was required to memorize at least one hundred lines of poetry a week. "Brodsky thought we Americans were lazy and illiterate," she laughed. "We had to come in knowing the poems by heart and write them down in longhand. When you have a poem in your head, you can really understand its being in your breath when you speak it."

I asked Howe if she recites from her books or from memory when she reads at public readings. "Both," she said. "I used to know all of my poems by heart, back when we used typewriters and I would have to retype them forty, fifty, sixty times. It was a great way to edit. I realized a poem was finished if I knew it by heart and it held together as a well-made piece. It's very different now with the awful ease of the computer, where you move things around without having to retype the whole body of a poem. Now, when I read, I glance at the page, but I know the poems pretty well."

When she was first taking Brodsky's class, Howe told me she was a "little embarrassed" by her high regard for Robert Frost, since Frost has so often been made into a trite American-as-apple-pie cartoon of a poet. In fact, Howe found Frost frightening, a dark spirit who reminded her of the first line of an Emily Dickinson poem—"I felt a funeral in my brain."

"Frost knows what happens between people," she explained. "He knows about madness, about death. I'm mesmerized by how his poems arrest our attention, containing the space between the *this* and the *that*, allowing the poem to contain the mystery in the minute gap that is the synapse between awareness and understanding. The mystery, rather than being obscure, becomes clear in its charged resonance. Frost said a poem was 'a momentary stay against confusion.'"

Howe soon learned how Brodsky, as well, revered Frost for his uncanny deftness in making memorable the live sound of the speaking voice. She read the essay Brodsky had written for the *New Yorker* about Frost, "On Grief and Reason," and she read the homages Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney had written elsewhere. Interestingly, each of these admirers is foreign-born—Brodsky from Russia, Heaney from Ireland, and Walcott from the Caribbean. In Brodsky's class, students were obliged to study Frost's poems with extreme attention, "consonant by consonant, vowel by vowel," Howe recalled. "I didn't even understand, at that time, how much consonants and vowels affected what was being said—the how of the what. How you say what you say is what you say."

Howe's identity as a poet was born in her developing understanding of the unity of form and content. For a poem to become a felt reality, its words must actualize thought in such a way that expression becomes its own content.



Howe at *The Poet Is In*, Grand Central Station, 2014

While at Columbia, she learned from other stellar figures: Heather McHugh, C. K. Williams, Jorie Graham, Grace Schulman. She studied with Edward Mendelson, who was W. H. Auden's literary executor, reading the great poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She had a course with Carolyn Heilbrun, the author of *Writing a Woman's Life*, a key feminist text urging women to evolve a perspective in which a woman's life does not end with her marriage. Heilbrun is also an expert on Virginia Woolf, and Howe pored over everything by the author of *A Room of One's Own*. Another key influence was Elaine Pagels, who was then teaching at Union Theological Seminary and had just written a book, *The Gnostic Gospels*, exploring the early origins of Christianity.

In an interview with Margaret Murphy in 2014 in *Provincetown Arts*, Howe reflected on the circumstances that led her to become a

poet. After graduate school, she won a Fellowship to the Fine Arts Work Center:

I arrived at the Work Center in my early thirties. In my twenties, I had wandered in the desert—it was a serious desert. . . .

During my Fellowship, I read a great deal, wrote, fell in love, suffered of course, and met my dear friend Stephanie Frank Sassoon, who was a painting Fellow then. I spent some part of every day sitting in Stephanie's studio looking at paintings and talking about life and art and what we were doing or trying to do. It was a great gift. It has shaped my life. The values of the Work Center are unlike anywhere else. It honors a vocation, the life as an artist. This is a remarkable thing. It resonated with me when I was a Fellow and it still does.

Marie's description of a period of "wandering in the desert," I thought, was an apt image of exile for a person of strong biblical upbringing. The desert was the place where she collected her thoughts, confronted and repulsed demons, and set a course of purposeful action. I wondered if she did not think thirty was a late age for a person to emerge as a poet. "Thirty?" she replied, unfazed. "That's not so late. I do workshops around the country, and see that it takes everyone, especially women, time to come into a creative life."

Because we are longish friends, I shared a confidence with Marie about my own belated blooming. I was in graduate school at Rutgers until I was thirty-seven, worrying a dissertation on D. H. Lawrence, who was himself a kind of crusading prophet. I recall a course in prosody with Paul Fussell, author of *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, for whom I wrote a paper and learned how Gerard Manley Hopkins's idea of "sprung rhythm" was key to Kunitz's rising cadences. In the interview I did with Stanley for the *Paris Review*, we discussed how the Elizabethan line of iambic pentameter, five beats per line, had been shortened in his poems to three beats, and he said that was because the



Howe on stage between Tina Chang and Jean Valentine, Brooklyn Book Festival, September 2015

contemporary breath unit had become abbreviated in our natural speech, in our own “kingdom of ordinary time,” to cite the title of Howe’s book.

In a blurb Kunitz offered for Howe’s first book, *The Good Thief*, he spoke of how her “long, deep-breathing lines address the mysteries of flesh and spirit, in terms accessible to a woman who is very much of our time and yet still in touch with the sacred.” Reading her poems, I am mesmerized by the parabolic power of implicitly poetic storytelling. It makes me consider the impact of Stanley’s poems, which seem less the result of metrical engineering than of profound revelations of oracular wisdom. Kunitz can utter lines that approach a biblical resonance—lines such as “We are living and dying at once”—stirring phrases that have formed a foundation for Howe’s own aesthetic.

Much in the way Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell” oblige one to reexamine legendary parables, the recent poems by Howe in the voice of Mary Magdalene compel us to reconsider her role in biblical doctrine. Was she the wife of Jesus? Did she bear Him two children? Was she a converted harlot who washed His feet? Is she the author of the controversial Gospel of Mary? According to scripture, she traveled the land with twelve other followers of Christ. She and Jesus’s mother were present at His death; they are both named Mary. With Mary Magdalene, Howe seems to have found an ideal persona, the voice of a strong modern woman.

“There are two Marys,” she explained. “Unfortunately, the way the world has been divided regarding women, between prostitute and saint, there is the Virgin Mother, who never had sex—which, of course, is ridiculous—and she is always depicted in paintings as reading a book, as if an angel has interrupted her and she looks up, keeping her place with her hand. Of course, after the Annunciation, she won’t be who she was.”

Provincetown Arts published one Mary poem, selected by Nick Flynn for our 2014 issue, titled “Magdalene—Men, Their Bodies”:

One penis was very large and thick so when he put it inside me I really did say Wow. One penis was uncircumcised and I loved to grip the shaft and pull down so the head popped out like a little man. . . . One slept inside me, comfortably at home.

The poem explores a diverse variety of erotic experiences, a somewhat secular analogue of the variety of religious experiences catalogued by William James. Howe’s mature, worldly, and contemporary point of view made me think of her as, perhaps, a secular nun.

Immediately, Howe shot back, “You’re wrong about that, Chris.”

Earlier, I had listened to a long interview Howe had done in a monastery in Minnesota with the *NPR* reporter Krista Tippett. Much of

the discussion concerned storytelling in the Bible, making me wonder about the relation of religion to various levels of anxiety. I recalled that the cultural anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski distinguished between magic, science, and religion according to a contextual function of difficulty and stress. To put it simply, for a tribe that depended on fish for sustenance, science occurred in the context of a day of fair weather, when fish were running and your boat was in good repair. Magic was invoked when the weather was stormy and your boat was leaky. Religion was revealed when there was a hurricane and your family was starving. The degree of stress is a fascinating factor in how our belief systems get formed. Stress is also connected to how we measure prosody. Howe’s poems read with repeated units of sound that have elongated rhythms akin to biblical cadences.

“I think that’s true,” she told me. “Certainly, the Bible was a deep, deep literary influence. The Book of Job has such a series of devastating questions.”

I pondered the fact that the last time God speaks in the Old Testament is in the Book of Job. After that, the various books consist mostly of commentary by the prophets. The Book of Job is a tribal epic, built like a temple with many hands. We feel how God is alone in his loneliness, an obscure being to humankind. He laments, “I have trodden the winepress alone, and of all the peoples there was no man with me” (Isaiah, 63:3). I suppose the poet, as a maker, identifies with the aloneness of God. Certainly, Robert Frost knew he was one acquainted with the night. My own teacher in graduate school at Rutgers, Richard Poirier, wrote *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing*, and he did the *Paris Review* interview with Frost. I read all the interviews in their wonderful series, beginning with George Plimpton and Hemingway, and that’s what inspired me to do the *Paris Review* interview with Stanley



PHOTO BY TED ROSENBERG

(from the bottom row, l to r) Alan Dugan, Therese Cader, Stanley Kunitz; David Ferry, Marie Howe, Tom Sleight; Maggie Dietz, Gerald Stern; Louise Glück, Marge Piercy, John Skoyles; Robert Pinsky, Mark Doty; Robin Becker, Frank Bidart, Lloyd Schwartz; Carl Phillips, David Rivard, Gail Mazur, 1999, Favorite Poems Project, Fine Arts Work Center

Kunitz. As we talked, Marie surprised me by mentioning that she had read the Kunitz interview “many times.”

IN 1989, MARIE HOWE suffered a great loss when her younger brother, John, died of AIDS at age twenty-eight. Howe, devastated, exploded with a series of passionate poems about the preciousness of life, which were published in her second book, *What the Living Do*. In the title poem, the living do exactly what the poet does in the “everyday”:

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries in the
street, the bag breaking,

I’ve been thinking: This is what the living do. And yesterday,
hurrying along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my coffee
down my wrist and sleeve

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a hairbrush:
This is it.

Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold.

I had read somewhere that Howe’s brother was something of a writer, and I asked her about his work. “He was young,” she said, “but we wrote many letters, maybe twice a week, hundreds of letters over the years. When I was at the Work Center in 1983, I had a deeply passionate relationship with Franz Wright. I used to read John’s letters to Franz. We would fall over laughing, they are so wonderful.”

So far, Howe produces a new volume of poetry once a decade, the first in 1988, the second in 1998, the most recent in 2008. Her next book of poems, *Magdalene*, in the voice of Mary Magdalene, is appearing well before the end of another decade. Only two of these poems have been published: “Magdalene and the Seven Devils” was published in 2011 (*American Poetry Review*, July/August). Howe begins this poem by quoting Luke 8:2: “Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been cast out.” Luke does not go into detail, but Howe makes the seven numbers speak of the ordinary obstacles that torment us as we exist in daily life.

Her contemporary kingdom of ordinary time seeks to deconstruct received mysteries. Howe elaborated: “One of the things I wanted to say earlier: When Sharon Olds brought out *Satan Says*, her first book up until 1980, it was men, men, men, men, and more men. At Columbia, I was taught three women poets: Elizabeth Bishop, Mona Van Duyn, and Marianne Moore. Suddenly, there was this explosion of women, writing about their lives. There was Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, but that was it. They were hard to follow as models. They killed themselves. It was hard to find a model of a living woman, who stayed alive, did not go crazy, and did her work.”

In a close historical parallel, the politics of the poetry world played out simultaneously in the art world. The Abstract Expressionists were completely macho. Hofmann, critiquing a painting by Lee Krasner when she was a student in his class, said, famously, “This is so good, you would not know it was done by a woman.”

Howe remarked that when she was a young woman in her twenties, writing for a local newspaper, she aspired to “write like a man”: “I thought that was the way to write. Hemingway, strong verbs, short sentences. Blunt, tough, straightforward. I wanted to be a writer; I didn’t know you could be a poet.”

She was becoming the person who would write the poems, which, as Kunitz said, was the first task of the young poet. In *The Good Thief*, one poem, “The Meadow,” opens with the image of latency, picturing a potency in a dormant meadow where the meadow is “trying, with difficulty, to remember how to make wildflowers.” In her periodic release of her poems, Howe seems to possess the organic patience and calm of the very meadow she describes.

Stanley Kunitz often spoke of the “tribal” nature shared by writers and artists, believing that “art withers without fellowship.” Marie’s tribe came from Provincetown, where most of them had Fellowships at the Work Center: Michael Cunningham, Michael Klein, Mark Doty, Nick Flynn, Sophie Cabot Black, Victoria Redel, Lucie Brock-Broido, Tony Hoagland, Richard McCann. Many had lost dear ones to AIDS. Jason Shinder also died too young when he succumbed to cancer. In his last years, Jason was taking more trips to hospitals than he was traveling around the country as a director of the reading series at the West Side Y in New York. He didn’t talk about being sick. I treated him as if I had no knowledge of his death sentence. That’s what he wanted.

Howe remembered, “Lucie, Sophie, and I attended Jason throughout his life and at the end. He died carrying his satchel stuffed with papers, books—his office. He opened the door to his apartment and fell down dead. That’s Jason. He would not lie down until he could not stand.”

I asked if Howe wanted to say something about Jason’s manuscripts, which she helped collect for Jason’s posthumous volume, *Stupid Hope*.

“There were so many versions of so many poems,” she explained. “Sophie did much to order them. We all thought, ‘Oh, he’s not dealing with the fact that he is sick and dying.’ Later, I was again at the Work Center, talking with Victoria. All of us exchanged poems. I had a manila envelope from Jason. I said, ‘Victoria, stay with me while I open this.’ I began to read, out loud, and we began to weep. My God, all that time that we thought he was in denial, he was in fact staring at the horizon, if you will, of his own death, as he approached it.”

In the year after Jason died, *Provincetown Arts* published a poem that had appeared in his final book. It was called “The Party,” and the scene is the conclusion of a birthday party he is attending:

And that’s how it is; everyone standing up from the big silence

of the table with their glasses of certainty and plates of forgiveness
and walking into the purple kitchen; everyone leaning away from
the gas stove

Marie blows on at the very edge of the breaking
blue-orange-lunging-

forward flames to warm another pot of coffee, while the dishes
pile up in the sink,
perfect as a pyramid. *Aaah*, says Donna, closing her eyes,

and leaning on Nick’s shoulders as he drives the soft blade of the knife
through the glittering dark of the leftover chocolate birthday cake.
That’s it; that’s how it is; everyone standing around as if just out
of the pool,

drying off. . . .

That’s how it is, that’s it, throwing your jacket over your shoulders

like a towel and saying goodbye Victoria goodbye Sophie goodbye
Lili goodbye sweetie take care be well hang in there see you soon.



CHRISTOPHER BUSA is founder and editorial director of *Provincetown Arts Press*.



Marie Howe and Tabitha Vevers at the Whitney Museum, 2015

TV

I have this image of riding my bike along the east end of Commercial Street and spotting you in the distance coming toward me against the traffic. Maybe twenty years ago. Long hair flying, we point at each other with outstretched arms as we pedal past, shouting out, “I’m a fan!” “No, I’m a fan!” In my mind it replays like a loop, as if it happened over and over again. I do think it happened more than once.

MH

When I first saw your pictures. (Can I call them that? That’s what Rainer Maria Rilke called Cézanne’s paintings when he saw them in Paris.) When I first saw those images I felt rooted to the ground. A woman rising out of the sea, a big fish on her shoulders. A woman’s body and inside her belly broken eggs. I thought, How does she know? No—I thought, She knows. Or I thought, She knows and my God she’s telling. What courage I thought. Or what beauty (gold leaf!!) and I felt no longer alone.

TV

Wow. I love hearing that. The raw immediacy of that kind of connection is something I hope for with my work. I feel the same power when I hear you read, or when I read your poems and hear your voice. I think, Oh my God, that’s truer than true. Truth that unites body and spirit and tenderness and pain, all merged into something deeper than I knew could be put into words or could ever be visible in ordinary daylight.

But “courage”? I don’t know. When I think of words like *courage* I think of firefighters running into burning houses and afterward saying, it wasn’t bravery, I was just doing my job. And that’s kind of how I feel. Creating the work has become this natural form of self-expression and I just feel this kind of imperative. The first lines of your early poem “Gretel, From a Sudden Clearing” have stayed with me for years, like a good kind of earworm—or a mantra I suppose:

No way back then, you remember, we decided,
but forward, deep into a wood

MH

Tabitha. The woods.

That’s where transformation happens, yes? Who (other artists? persons?) or what gave you courage as an artist to go into the woods?

TV

An encouraging studio visit from Gregory Gillespie in the mid-’80s comes to mind, just at the point when I was headed toward narrative

Marie Howe

+

Tabitha Vevers

A Conversation

work. Also, you know how an oyster forms a pearl in order to protect itself from a painful grain of sand? So there’s that too.

What about you? Was it Stanley Kunitz? Or poetry in general? Private space or time?

MH

In the mid-’80s, when that happened to you, I was just out of the Work Center and living in Cambridge writing my first book and teaching composition classes at Tufts University.

The galvanizing moment in my life was when I saw my father take his last breath and die. I saw that we die. My life, and everyone else’s life, is finite. From that moment I decided to do what I was called to do.

My father dying was freeing too—we had had a close and difficult relationship. He suffered from alcoholism, and was often violent when he was drinking, and especially violent toward me. His death allowed me to finally speak of it. But my father too was the person who encouraged me to write. Whenever I asked him what he wanted for his birthday, for Christmas, he’d say, I want you to write something. Without his constant and early encouragement I don’t know that I would have gone on.

Interesting—you moving toward narrative. We both tell stories.

Your stories have so much silence in them! They are like poems in that they hold what cannot be summarized. That is one of the great



SHELL SERIES: *Pearlmaker VII*, 2013, oil and gold leaf on oyster shell, 3.25 by 3 by 1.25 inches PRIVATE COLLECTION



SECULAR ICONS: *Rage*, 1991, oil and mixed media on wood relief, 15 by 18.75 inches
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

qualities—perhaps the essential quality I honor in your work. That, and the beauty. You tell unspeakable, beautiful stories.

What painters inspired you to do that?

TV

Oh Marie. We're able to create because we fully own our experience, good and bad, right? You get to the point where you wouldn't recognize yourself without it. I feel a sense of gratitude that you had that kind of encouragement—I so value that your poems exist in this world with their honesty and beauty and power. But, as you said, these things can be complicated too. I had always felt support in the sense of the value of being an artist—in my family, art was our religion. And my father's death nearly slayed me. But when I asked my dad for a crit as a young artist, probably right after college, he said, "What do you think this is, art by consensus?" I was hurt and hungry for something more, but let's face it—I learned a lot from that! My dad also used to give me Hieronymus Bosch books as a child, and Mum used to listen to Dylan night and day. So those were two crazy, individual storytellers who probably had a big influence on me. Honestly, I just thought they were normal. Which explains a lot. When I was looking at Giotto's fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel in Padua, it was the first time that art made me cry. My tears hit the marble floor with an audible splat.

MH

Giotto! Of course! My dearest friend when I was a Fellow at the Work Center, Stephanie Frank Sassoon, showed me those Giotto's. Those real faces. Those anguished angels, sobbing in the air around the cross Jesus was nailed to. Years and years later Stephanie and I stood in that chapel in Padua together and looked at those pictures. What did Kafka say? Art is the axe that breaks the frozen sea within us. Robert Frost did that for me when I was younger, then Emily Dickinson, then Whitman, then Rilke, and then . . . contemporaries. Including Stanley Kunitz, who wrote the lines I carry in my heart:

In a murderous time
the heart breaks and breaks
and lives by breaking.
It is necessary to go
through dark and deeper dark
and not to turn.

From "The Testing-Tree"

TV

Yes! I have Stanley's poem "The Layers" hanging in my studio. He incorporates this voice that just came to him and said, "Live in the layers, and not on the litter"—years ago I woke to this Morgan Freeman-like voice in my head commanding, "Eat. Dance. Feed your brain." Ever since then it's almost felt as though I've been living the prequel to my own epitaph. But as Stanley concludes his poem, "I am not done with my changes."

And here we are back in that dark woods. It reminds me of one of your new poems—and how kids, even with all their joyful exuberance, or maybe because of it, just naturally understand that we *have* to look, that we *have* to wrangle with the darkness. Grimm's fairy tales!

Conversation: Dualism

Is that bad? The girl says, when someone tells a story, or
when we see

An accident on the road, or lately when almost anything
happens.

Well, I say, not good, nor bad.

But is it bad? She says again, sensing my small

Hesitancy. Well,

Not good, I say

—and that seals it.

NEW FROM



Provincetown Arts Press



"These are ripe, rueful tales, crepuscular in spirit and yet urgent, at times blazing with romance, with desperation. . . . If all art is a form of doing wrong, a breaking of the rules, then the same could be said of the work of Roger Skillings—unique whorls that mark both these pages and the reader, stories that will not go unknown, or be forgotten."

— from the introduction by
Jhumpa Lahiri

Summer's End

STORIES BY ROGER SKILLINGS

See form on page 168 to order.

Roger Skillings and Jhumpa Lahiri

A PROVINCETOWN CHRONICLE

When Provincetown Arts Press first planned to publish the latest collection of short stories by R. D. Skillings, Summer's End, I knew I needed to find someone exceptional to write an introduction for such an important book. Jhumpa Lahiri, an award-winning author and a former Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center, was the perfect choice. After all, Roger Skillings was the first person to greet her when, in the spring of 1997, Lahiri drove to Provincetown to explore the Work Center, which had just offered her a seven-month residency.

At the time, she was apprehensive, reluctant, with questions about what sort of place simply trusted the inner compass of the Fellows to produce creative work. Lahiri had pursued a career in academia, earning three master's degrees along with a PhD in English. Her immigrant parents had encouraged the stability of teaching in a university, but Lahiri had begun writing and was accepted as a Fellow on her handful of astute stories, which continued to pour out during her time in Provincetown. This collection of work, later published as Interpreter of Maladies, won the Pulitzer Prize—which is rare for a book of short stories.

Roger Skillings, chair of the FAWC writing committee, took her around the Work Center grounds, showing her the Stanley Kunitz Common Room—a room named for the poet Stanley Kunitz, which had originally been used to store coal, and now would be dedicated, Kunitz had once declared, to a higher form of energy—the imagination. Escorting Lahiri to the quarters where she would stay, Roger led her up the stairs to an area that had once been used as a studio for Robert Motherwell. Writers stayed in their work spaces, and Lahiri would live on the top floor of what is called “the Barn.” She looked inside and said to Roger, “Can I live here?”

— CB

IN JUNE OF 1966, when he was twenty-nine years old, living in Boston, R.D. Skillings fell in love with Provincetown at first sight. After three summers there, he moved to Provincetown year-round in May of 1969 and won one of the first seven Fellowships in writing at the newly established Fine Arts Work Center, then a fledgling organization founded to support visual artists and writers at the early stages of their careers. A native of Bath, Maine, Skillings has lived in P-town year-round ever since.

Located at the extreme tip of Cape Cod, Provincetown is a place both minuscule and vast. It has been home, in the course of its history, to Native Americans, Pilgrims, fishermen, immigrants, outcasts, homosexuals, makers, visionaries. Those who know it know this rich, eclectic broth. They know the insular embrace of Commercial Street, the barren sweep of the dunes, the wildness of the surrounding sea. They know that it is a place whose beauty both beckons and bewilders, a place where creativity thrives.

For forty-five years this town has been Skillings's muse, his mooring, the setting and subject of most of his fiction. He is a writer for whom place is character and vice versa. His steadfast devotion to his landscape and its inhabitants yields depth of vision, shades of variety. Provincetown is the

Copernican sun around which, for this writer, all else revolves.

His work ranges from the very short story to the novel, in addition to poetry. His first collection of stories, *Alternative Lives*, was published in 1974, followed by *P-town Stories (or The Meat-rack)* in 1980, *In a Murderous Time* in 1984, and *Where the Time Goes* in 1999. A novel, *How Many Die*, and a novella, *Obsidian*, appeared in 2001. A collection of poems, *Memory for Marisa Rose*, was published in 2003.

The present collection of stories, his eighth book, maps the journey of the writer's life: childhood and upbringing in Bath, Maine; postcollegiate years spent in Boston; and the discovery and subsequent adoption of Provincetown. As such, it is a portrait in three acts of New England

Summer's End



itself, from its shipyards and summer camps, to its mixed-race urban neighborhoods of the 1960s, to what arguably remains its most unconventional outpost. It is a portrait of the region's evolution, its gentrification and, in certain respects, its decline. It is a polyphonic portrait of rich and poor, WASPs and minorities, men and women, young and old.

The stories set in Maine are layered ruminations on innocence and loss. Skillings's young characters thirst for experience, for elsewhere. They are sensitive, solitary boys, almost always aware of their "small knowledge of life." They pass idyllic summers idle, flattening pennies on train tracks. The young narrator of "The Rights of Salvage" thinks of his parents as ancestors, his home a confining museum.

I chafed to escape to my favorite playground, the old shipyards, where we hopped from piling to piling or with arms outstretched walked the rotted timbers of sagging wharves. . . . Only a faint clangor reached us from the iron works a mile downriver, and I dreamed of far places, the East Indies perhaps or the Cape of Good Hope.

While the young yearn for escape, and for experience, the old, "dazed at the thought of everything vanishing," long to be young again. They revisit the past, estranged by it, still struggling to decipher it. Some, for whom memory falters, dream simply of remembering.

The Boston stories are located in the city's South End. We move from Maine's dark glassy lakes and loon calls to a gritty landscape of nightclubs, STD clinics, and funeral parlors. Many of the protagonists make a conscious choice to live apart from their families, to forge a separate path. They reject what they come from and gravitate toward the unknown. Two of these stories are love stories, unlikely interracial couplings that would have been considered controversial at the time. "The Blue Stone," a moving portrait of the artist as a young man, explores the hard choice and practice of living by and for one's writing.

I set out to paper my room with rejections. The size of a wall, the smallness of a slip—even the most elegant, embossed and tinted—in time dulled the romance of failure, and one glum day, when I got six stories back in the same mail, I forswore the ceremonial bonfire I had planned for them, and dropped them in the trash. That night I caught a glimpse of myself in the window—a rich man's decadent son killing time.

Every artist, at some point, has felt the futility of his or her contribution, and at the same time the necessity of it. Skillings does not flinch from self-examination, devastating as it may be.

In addition to recounting one writer's beginnings, "The Blue Stone," like most of the stories set in Boston, is an affecting exploration of the racial politics that marked the city at the time. Skillings discreetly evokes the bigotry that hangs in the air as the Racial Integration Act of 1965 requires forced busing in Boston, as violence erupts and protests rage. His characters embrace idealism and yet instinctively apprehend its limits. Rick, the protagonist of "What Befell Her," enamored of a black dancer, harbors "a constant, cloudy daydream of them uniting for a better world, but he could never tell her this for fear she would think him naive."

In Provincetown we encounter more aspiring writers, working-class locals, draft-dodgers, Vietnam vets. We find ourselves at an all-night party, in a nursing home, in various bars. One story has as its characters Fellows at the Fine Arts Work Center, which, in addition to his fiction, has been one of Roger Skillings's great contributions to the world. He has been an integral part of its growth, serving as trustee and chair of its writing committee for twenty years. His tireless, boundless faith in young writers has changed the destinies of many, including my own. Those who know Skillings admire his dedication to others. Those who come to this collection as a means of introduction will perceive his dedication to his art.

His fiction reflects a lifetime of brave artistic soldiering, of following no fashion or trend. He honors his literary forebearers without affect. He lives and works from the edges, knowing instinctively that this is the writer's place. As a result his work remains untouched by conventional currents, commonplace themes.

These are ripe, rueful tales, crepuscular in spirit and yet urgent, at times blazing with romance, with desperation. A young man, infatuated with a woman he has just spent the night with but barely knows, wants to buy a red ribbon for her hair. A woman craving sex pulls down her stretch pants in a bar, exposing herself. His technique suggests plein-air painting: a writer in the field, observing, absorbing, and sure-handedly capturing what he sees and hears. He is a master of dialogue, knowing how people speak in bars, in barbershops, at parties. He marries his own voice to those of others, always faithfully. Though elemental and at times

astrigent, his stories are characterized by wit and warmth. He is a writer who delights in humankind and at the same time despairs of it. He understands the plight of those who have no one to call their own.

Death looms in these tales, accidental, intentional, inevitable. Some die alone, dimly recalled. But places also die, leaving us equally bereft. Small towns in Maine turn into shopping malls, the hardscrabble bars of Provincetown are replaced by upscale restaurants and shops. Boston's South End, as it is described in this book, scarcely exists today. Skillings describes the emotional impact of that change, the brutality of it.

Art is what does not shift or erode, what outlives us, what accompanies us from beginning to end. The following line in "The Rights of Salvage," describing the fingerprinting of a group of fifth-grade boys who have been caught stealing iron, perhaps alludes to this idea: "Our unique whorls would follow us through life, and nothing we did wrong would remain unknown or ever be forgotten." Self-expression identifies the artist, tethering him to the world. If all art is a form of doing wrong, a breaking of the rules, then the same could be said of the work of Roger Skillings—unique whorls that mark both these pages and the reader, stories that will not go unknown, or be forgotten. ■

—Jhumpa Lahiri

Mary Oliver

ON BENDED KNEE

By Margaret Murphy

Let the beauty we love be what we do.

There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

— Rumi, thirteenth century



1.

Mary Oliver's newest volume of poetry was published last fall, within weeks of her eightieth birthday. The book is called *Felicity*, Mary's word for the feeling in her heart in living her life now, and the best word for our own state of grace in hearing her speak again.

2.

*Finally the world is beginning
to change, its fevers mounting,
its leaves unfolding.*

*And the mockingbirds find
ample reason and breath to fashion
new songs. They do. You can
count on it.*

3.

Mary has described herself as a person who does the walking and the scribbling and then works the scribbled things into poems. The new poems give witness to this person, who has long been recognized as one of our greatest living poets. Mary can experience and express profound connection to the world's beauty and mystery and the inner lives of people and other living things. We have come to count on her for this, and her new collection does it for us.

Her empathy for all Creation is among her greatest gifts. *Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures. (Canticle of the Sun, St. Francis of Assisi)* Mary sees a miracle in newborn chicks hatching out of redbird eggs, chicks who know nothing about the sky that's waiting for them, or even that they have wings. She hears the trees speaking to the wind and talking to the sun but also, later, crying out at the sawmill.

4.

A redbird—a cardinal—is a songbird that does not migrate and has traditionally been more common in warmer climes such as the US Southeast, although it also lives in New England. Unlike many songbirds, both male and female redbirds sing, and the female often vocalizes with song from her nest. Mary called her twelfth volume of poetry *Red Bird*. *Felicity* is her twenty-fifth volume.

5.

Mary has said that poetry is a community ritual. She wants to pay attention, be astonished, and tell about it. What she says, she says for all of us. She cultivates simple words and everyday life, and writes so that everyone who is interested can share her experience. When she wakes early and takes her walks, it enriches everyone. She has described the world as the theater of the spiritual. In this way, her poems offer instructions for living a life. Her new poems do all of this, adding to the vast treasure of beloved lines and lessons that her poetry gives to the universe.

Recently, living her life has brought new experiences. Mary is on her morning walk at creek-edge and decides to jump across as she has hundreds of times. *"Something in me refuses to abdicate."* This time, for the first time, she falls in.

She moved from one house to another and rented a storage space that she filled with her things. As time passed, the things she cared about grew fewer. One day she called the trash man and he took it all. *"Things! Burn them, burn them! Make a beautiful fire! More room in your heart for love, for the trees! For the birds who own nothing—the reason they can fly."*

6.

Half of Mary's new poems are love poems. They tell us about Mary running toward love's allure. They let God and the world know she is grateful for the gift of loving and being loved. The poems are exuberant. She quotes from Rumi about a field beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing. The last poem is about her heart lying down in that field and being happy.

7.

*I'm living in a warm place now, where
you can purchase fresh blueberries all
year long. Labor free. From various
countries in South America. They're
as sweet as any, and compared with the
berries I used to pick in the fields
outside Provincetown, they're
enormous. But berries are berries. They
don't speak any language I can't
understand. Neither do I find ticks or
small spiders crawling among them. So,
generally speaking, I'm very satisfied.*

*There are limits, however. What they
don't have is the field. The field they
belonged to and through the years I
began to feel I belonged to. Well,
there's life, and then there's later.
Maybe it's myself that I miss. The
field, and the sparrow singing at the
edge of the woods. And the doe that one
morning came upon me unaware, all
tense and gorgeous. She stamped her hoof
as you would to any intruder. Then gave
me a long look, as if to say, Okay, you
stay in your patch, I'll stay in mine.
Which is what we did. Try packing that
up, South America.*



8.

Mary Oliver lived in Provincetown for fifty years, and now lives in a small town in Florida. The town is close to the Atlantic coast, just inland from a national wildlife refuge. The refuge is home to beach-nesting birds and sea turtles and hundreds of acres of mangrove trees. The mangroves thrive shoulder to shoulder with the coastal waters, and canopies of gnarled banyan trees grace the road across the bridge to the refuge. When Mary walks in the morning now, what she sees in the rising sun are mangroves. How blessed we are that, wherever she is, Mary is still walking and scribbling, seeing the beauty of this world, and instructing us about living our lives. 🌿

MARGARET MURPHY was Executive Director of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, and an environmental lawyer and advocate in New York City. Upon her departure from the Work Center, it created a Named Endowed Fellowship in her honor. She lives in New York and Provincetown and devotes her time to nonprofit and naturalist endeavors.

Rumi lines from *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, © 1995, published by HarperCollins, New York.

2. Excerpted from "Late Spring," published in the collection *Felicity* by Mary Oliver, © 2015 by Mary Oliver, published by The Penguin Press, New York.

5. Excerpted from "Cobb Creek" and "Storage," published in the collection *Felicity* by Mary Oliver, © 2015 by Mary Oliver, published by The Penguin Press, New York.

7. "Blueberries," from the collection *Blue Horses* by Mary Oliver, © 2014 by Mary Oliver, published by The Penguin Press, New York.

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The Prime Thing

PHILIP HOARE AND PROVINCETOWN

By Dennis Minsky

YOU CAN TELL A GREAT DEAL about a town by its visitors. Take Provincetown. I would be the first to extol the charm of our natural setting, our quaint little fishing village with its narrow winding streets, backed by the wild beauty of the dunes and surrounded by the angry Atlantic and Cape Cod Bay, its harbor filled with boats. And I am proud to be a resident: we year-round inhabitants are indeed a special lot (those of us who survive), trudging through the off-season slush past shut-down restaurants, bars, shops, and galleries, moving through the infinite shades of gray specific to our winter, showing up for town meeting to make a quorum with ever-dwindling numbers, roaming through the relatively deserted aisles of Stop & Shop, and, of course, making art, writing, or just talking a good game. But it is the *visitors* who in many ways define our town, give it its unique, neither fish nor fowl, neither country-mouse nor city-mouse, persona.

Thoreau was a visitor (just parts of three weeks, 1849, 1850, and 1855). And Eugene O'Neill (almost nine years, beginning in 1916). And Tennessee Williams (four seasons, 1940, 1941, 1944, and 1947). And so, too, is Philip Hoare. Hoare, the author of *Leviathan, or The Whale* (HarperCollins, 2008)—winner of the BBC Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction in 2009—and *The Sea Inside* (HarperCollins, 2013), is a good visitor.

He was first lured to town in 2001 by his friend John Waters (himself a visitor). Waters extolled the virtues of the town as only he could do—just try to visualize “a gay fishing village.” Hoare did notice that aspect, but there was something else, something profound and life-changing, about his encounter with Provincetown. “It was kind of an appointment,

a fateful date,” he says, and his life and his work turned an abrupt corner. Sometime between his maiden whale watch and his first walk through town, his stay at the White Horse Inn, his mingling with people like Mary Oliver and Molly Malone Cook and Frank Schaefer, he was a changed man and a changed writer.

Prior to that first visit, Hoare had a string of respectable books under his belt, including two social histories of England, and biographies of Stephen Tennant, Oscar Wilde, and Noël Coward. But it was this “sliver of sand . . . where the past is implicit” that abruptly changed the focus of his work, and indeed his life. He was to write about whales. But Hoare writes about whales the way Melville wrote about whales. It is not just the whales, but the sea that produces them, not just the sea, but

the land that abuts it, not just the land, but the people who venture out from it, and, most of all, it is about the encounter of humanity and whales. He focuses on what draws us all to these iconic animals and what it means about us. More than 150 years after the publication of *Moby-Dick*, Hoare is confronting Melville's issues in a modern context. In the course of our lifetime, the whale has been transformed from commodity to environmental symbol, which leads to a challenging complexity. This is the heart of Hoare's work. He views whales and the sea they live in as the lens for confronting our own nature. And it began in Provincetown.

If ever Philip Hoare warrants a biography (and who among us does not?), there will

(above) Philip Hoare on the Herring Cove beach in Provincetown
ALL PHOTOS BY DENNIS MINSKY

certainly be in that work a chapter entitled “Provincetown.” Perhaps it will be a major division of the book, because his arrival in town represents a significant juncture in his life—a fulcrum—and even more so in his work. It would be too neat a parallel to posit that Provincetown is to Philip Hoare what New Bedford is to young Ishmael, Melville’s protagonist in *Moby-Dick*. Neither New Bedford nor Nantucket, where the voyage begins, represents the crucible that forges Ishmael’s very being. That crucible is his ship, the *Pequod*. In Ishmael’s own words:

And, as for me, if, by any possibility, there be any as yet undiscovered prime thing in me; if I shall ever deserve any real repute in that small but high hushed world which I might not be unreasonably ambitious of; if hereafter I shall do anything that, upon the whole, a man might rather have done than to have left undone; if, at my death, my executors, or more properly my creditors, find any precious MSS. in my desk, then here I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.

The “prime thing” in Philip Hoare is his obsession with whales and their “watery world,” and the germ of that obsession was absolutely acquired in Provincetown and, most especially, on a Dolphin Fleet whale watch. Then mix in his association with all the captains, first mates, naturalists, galley rats, line handlers, ticket takers (not to mention passengers); overlay his contacts at the Center for Coastal Studies, the researchers and scientists; add the eclectic bunch of artists and writers whom he has encountered and fostered as friends. But at the center of it all is the whale.

Hoare tells me, “The only place I am happy, apart from being in the sea, is on the bridge of a Dolphin Fleet boat, heading out of the harbor.” While whales are central to the activity, there is more: “It seems to me to be *Moby-Dick* to the life. You could almost cast captains like Todd Motta, Mark Dalomba, and Joe Bones into Melville’s book. I think it is that culture—which really is a reprise of the New England whaling culture updated to the modern age—that I find almost as fascinating as the whales: the language, the rituals, the responses. They evoke both a closeness and a distance—that vexed meeting of human and natural history.”

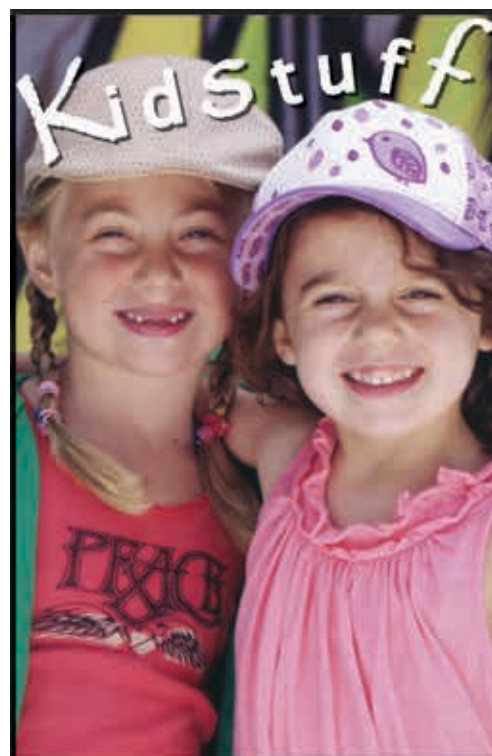
Hoare is able to communicate this aspect of whale culture (the culture of people’s interactions with whales, as opposed to the actual culture of the animals themselves—another matter entirely, and one that he is at the forefront of reporting), and blend it with a fair share of whale science, and deliver this admixture to a large readership who would like to straddle both worlds. He is conversant with the latest science and confers with experts and biologists around the world, not least at the Center for Coastal Studies, an internationally

acclaimed whale research center, based in Provincetown. He has been out on the Center’s research boat, the *Shearwater*, and hung out in the labs. Stormy Mayo, cofounder and chief scientist at the Center, has this to say: “Philip’s writing transcends simple prose poetry by translating the details of ocean science into the vernacular of today, seducing us with brilliant insight into his, and therefore our, vision of the rich and vulnerable sea.”

Hoare is also a fixture in Provincetown’s art scene, a familiar with such artists as Pat de Groot, Elspeth Vevers, Ellen Gallagher, Jo Hay, Connie Banks, James Balla, and the late Arthur Cohen. In 2009, he presented his BBC documentary *The Hunt for Moby-Dick* at the Provincetown Film Festival. In 2015, he cocurated (with Elizabeth Bradfield) a show entitled *Cape Whale* at the Center for Coastal Studies SEA Space gallery, and organized and participated in a reading there. He speaks the language of artists and feels akin to them and “their minds gloriously uncontained and expansive.” He has been, and continues to be, behind the scenes and smack in the middle of many of the global events celebrating and exploring our relationship with whales and “the way the whale is a guiding spirit to this place.” Liz Bradfield comments: “The power in Philip’s voice is in his long-standing obsession [and his] ongoing questioning of the sea and its creatures. . . . He is . . . a writer who follows a deep and personal engagement. He returns to it, as he does to Provincetown and to the whale watch boats, with both new understanding and new questions.”

For fifteen years now, he has returned every year, usually a few times a year, sometimes in summer, but more often off-season. He prefers winter, he says, when “the bones of the town reappear out of all that summer frippery.” When he is here, he is often ensconced at Pat de Groot’s place, writing (he is working on a third book, presumably whale-centered), but at the same time he is actively here. He describes Provincetown as “a fragile place of ‘isolatoes,’ as Melville called them.” When he arrives, he reattaches with a vengeance, a ferocity. Between visits, and stays in his native England, he has traveled the world, mostly in pursuit of the passion that he acquired here. In 2013, he orchestrated and curated (with artist Angela Cockayne) a complete online reading, with artists’ images, of *Moby-Dick* (at mobydickbigread.com). Quite a few Provincetown readers are featured, along with such notables as Tilda Swinton, Nathaniel Philbrick, and Benedict Cumberbatch. He has been to Haiti, the Azores, Tasmania, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Mexico . . . but it all started here in Provincetown.

Hoare also played a part this spring in Provincetown’s very first Moby Dick Festival, which delivered on all the aspects of the whale he loves: the scientific, the metaphysical, the literary, the artistic, the cultural and historical—its totality. Philip Hoare asks: “What better place than Provincetown?”



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The value of a visitor is a view through new eyes, which show us what is right in front of us, what we had all along. Annie Dillard (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 1974) said, "The great hurrah about wild animals is that they exist at all, and the even greater hurrah is the actual moment of seeing them." Hoare celebrates that greater hurrah. He shows all of us—the staid scientists and researchers at the Center for Coastal Studies, the grizzled crews of the Dolphin Fleet, the rank-and-file citizens of the town amassed at Herring Cove and Race Point to catch glimpses of whales close to shore—the utter and profound joy of whales, their place in the continuum of existence, the continuum of intelligent and social life, the continuum of human history and our interaction with the natural world.

In *Leviathan, or The Whale*, Philip Hoare eloquently describes this unique world. Where a scientist might describe whales as "charismatic megafauna," Hoare refers to them as "barnacled angels." While researchers attempt to categorize whales' breaching behavior, Philip compares it to the way children launched themselves off MacMillan Wharf, "placing implicit trust in their immortality as they hurl themselves from one medium to the other." They rise out of the sea "to reveal their majesty." Fully (and continuously) aware of the dangers of anthropomorphism, still Hoare declares, "Whales exist beyond the normal, beyond what we expect to see in our daily lives . . . possessed of a supernatural physicality . . .



Philip Hoare on the bayside beach in Provincetown

entirely mutable, dreamlike because they exist in another world, because they look like we feel as we float in our dreams."

Whales live in "an environment in which communication and socializing take the place of material culture. Theirs is a landless race, free from mortgages and fossil fuel, unconstrained by borders or want, content merely to sing and sleep and eat and die. . . . The whale lives between worlds; that is its miracle, and its folly."

He agrees with and quotes Henry Beston (*The Outermost House*, 1928), referring to wildlife: "They are not our brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners

of the splendor and travail of the Earth."

Here is Hoare describing an endangered right whale: "Looking down into the water, I could see its great white jaw swinging open like some massive hinged door, wide enough to garage a car—the largest mouth of any living creature."

Here is a humpback whale surfacing: "As it rises, rivulets run off its graphite-black back like threads of quicksilver; huge pectoral fins glow below the surface, turned luminous green by suspended plankton."

Here it is diving: "The movement is fluid, sinuous, of a piece: the rising and falling rostrum; the arching back and dorsal fin; the curving, sinewy tail and broad flukes, water dripping from their trailing edge, a diamond curtain glittering in the sunlight. The whale is freeze-framed in the act, caught at this tipping point between its world and ours."

Here is a feeding frenzy, involving three species of whales, along with gulls and terns and shearwaters and storm petrels: "All around me is action, hunger, life and death. . . . The ocean itself seemed to be exploding. . . . It was as if humans had never happened, as if the ocean had reverted to another Eden."

He is in constant awe: "Even now, I cannot reconcile myself to their corporality."

In these glowing descriptions of what whales are, Hoare somehow describes what we are not—it is not so much their otherness as our own: we are condemned to be apart from the natural world, but there is a piece of us that wants to connect. Philip Hoare is the poet of this faulty and frenetic connection; he lives in this diaspora, and celebrates it, and somehow this celebration especially resonates here in Provincetown, "a place apart." ☒

DENNIS MINSKY has been a resident of Provincetown since 1968, when he began working at *Ciro & Sal's Restaurant*, and has been a year-round resident since 2005. He has worked for the Cape Cod National Seashore, the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, the Dolphin Fleet Whale Watch, and Art's Dune Tours. He is the chair of the Provincetown Conservation Commission and the Open Space Committee. He tries to write.

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IN SEARCH OF

Edna St. Vincent Millay

By William Bless

JOURNEYS OFTEN BEGIN for mysterious reasons and take unexpected forms. I began reading the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay about two years ago and fell in love with it, especially poems such as “Renascence,” “My Heart, Being Hungry,” “The Buck in the Snow,” “Memory of Cape Cod,” and “The Wood Road.” However, I would say what really prompted this essay was a visit this past summer to Millay’s house in upstate New York, Steepletop, which she bought in 1925. The house and grounds are unchanged since Millay’s death in 1950, and there are many reminders of her life here, including a stone pool built in the foundations of an old barn, where Millay and her husband, Eugen Boissevain, hosted Jazz Age parties. Other relics of the past include her writing cabin, and, at the crest of a wind-swept hill, the indentation of an ancient tennis court. On a path in the woods, not far from the house, is Edna’s grave.



Edna St. Vincent Millay

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Not long after this visit, I became aware of a connection between Millay and the Lower Cape while reading *Truro: The Story of a Cape Cod Town* by Richard F. Whalen, and that’s when I decided that I would try to find the location in Truro where the poet and her family stayed—the actual house, if possible. Thus began my quest, which led to a greater understanding of this extraordinary woman, her life, her work, and the remarkable era in which she lived.

TRURO NOWADAYS is far from the isolated sea town it was in 1920. The Highland Lighthouse is still there, to be sure, but the rural maritime farms are gone, replaced now with contemporary beach homes, some grandiose on bluffs, some secreted away at the end of sandy drives. Paddleboarders instead of weir fish-trap poles are outlined against the horizon on the bay, bicyclists and walkers ply the old rail beds, and endless armadas of SUVs with all manner of aquatic toys churn up paved Route 6. Despite this, evidence of the old Truro remains: the beautiful, solitary Greek Revival and Federal-style cottages and houses, tucked back on quiet, secluded roads, built by early settlers who had enduring ancestral roots in the region; remnants of the Old King’s Highway; and, of course, the boreal ocean pounding away at the hills.

I imagine that poet, playwright, and actress Edna St. Vincent Millay would have viewed a similar scene when she came here in the summer of 1920, arriving at the North Truro train station with her mother, Cora, and younger sisters, Norma and Kathleen. They would have made their way on the unpaved sandy lanes to Higgins Hollow Road, where they had rented a cottage in the lee of Green Hill. The cottage was owned by George Cram Cook (known as “Jig”) and his wife, Susan Glaspell—both seasoned writers and playwrights—who, along with Eugene O’Neill, were the creative force behind the founding of the groundbreaking Provincetown Players. Just nine miles to the north, at the tapering end of Cape Cod, was a rich, raw bouillabaisse of artists, actors, and writers, as well as Portuguese fishermen who, for many

generations, had eked out a living from the plentiful waters around the glacial peninsula.

Twenty-eight-year-old Edna—or “Vincent,” as she preferred to be called—had come to Truro to escape the heat and romantic distractions of Greenwich Village, hoping to find solace in the seaside community. The cottage, even by the Millays’ Camden, Maine, standards (where Edna had grown up), was primitive, consisting of only a few rooms, no plumbing, no electricity, and only a well. Lack of amenities notwithstanding, Millay reveled in the natural ocean environment, feeling an immediate affinity for the undulating, sparsely vegetated dunes; clusters of scrubby oak, beach plum, bayberry; and, a mile or so from the planked house, the primordial thunder of the surf, scouring away at the near vertical bluffs. In a letter to Allan Ross Macdougall, a Village friend who had helped her place poems in an English journal called the *Nation*, she wrote,

[We] have all come to a dear little house on a windy hill in Truro, which is nine miles from Provincetown, to spend at least five months and possibly six. . . . [It] is a mile and a half only to the outside surfy sea, a lonesome beach where you never see anybody but sand-pipers. There are whip-poor-wills which not infrequently keep one awake all night, but nobody cares much, it’s such a sweet sound, and there are millions of mosquitoes sometimes. . . . The wind blows a gale about this cottage all the time. . . . We have your Victrola here, and I do all my work to the tune of the Fifth Symphony.¹

It was here that Millay collected seashells, took walks along Longnook Beach, read and memorized poetry, listened enraptured to Beethoven on a hand-cranked Victrola lent to her by Macdougall, and strung along the amorous, desperate hopes of a long line of persistent male suitors, including a young Edmund Wilson and John Peale Bishop, both editors at *Vanity Fair*. Wilson proposed to her on the mosquito-infested front porch and received the ambiguous response that she’d think about it. Just the spring before, Millay—bisexual, and promiscuous in her days at Vassar, where she



The Millay family in 1930 (left to right: Norma, Cora, Edna, and Kathleen)

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“MILLAY SISTERS – EDNA, NORMA AND KATHLEEN.” NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS.

had graduated three years earlier—had relieved Wilson’s burden of his twenty-something virginity. He’d become irrevocably bewitched by her, as most men and women did. Millay’s almost predatory beauty—grayish green eyes, cheeky wit, and nest of bobbed hair, the color of red maple leaves in autumn—is legendary.

That August, Wilson had traveled to the Cape with a conventional aspiration to find Millay’s cottage, roaming lost at night across fields until he saw an incandescence from a small house that he was certain must be the one where she was staying. In *The Shores of Light*, Wilson describes the four Millay women, who “gave me a dinner on a plain board table by the light of an oil lamp.” He was more than a little astounded by the Millay family—three beautiful sisters of Irish descent, and Cora Millay, the matriarch, who reminded him of “a New England school-teacher, yet there was something almost raffish about her. She had anticipated the Bohemianism of her daughters.” Norma, Edna’s equally lovely sister, told the shocked, genteel Wilson that on their first night it had poured and that they had all used a flowing “spout” for a shower, unaware if any of the occupants of other local houses tucked in the hollow could see them.

The sisters entertained Wilson with old European peasant tunes; he was particularly smitten when Edna sang to him an Estonian song called “Wedding Joy”—certainly misleading, since she was never to accept his marriage proposal. He would also remember other things as a result of her attentive vivaciousness—Jig Cook’s daughter on the beach, a mottled seagull egg, and the Fifth Symphony, which took on a new life for him. It was as though she were framing beauty for him, acting as a conduit for

a life and loveliness he couldn’t perceive. Wilson left on the Truro train a few days later without an answer one way or the other, in a love agony he would later describe as “the chief maelstrom of [my] early years.”

A year later he met Millay again, this time in Paris, where she went as a correspondent for *Vanity Fair*, beginning to ride the crest of a wave that would lift her to literary and personal stardom. In a 1921 letter to Peale, his close friend and also one of Millay’s lovers, Wilson confides, “[She] told me that she wanted to settle down to a new life: she was tired of breaking hearts and spreading havoc.” At the time she had just ended an affair with a married man. In *Letters on Literature and Politics: 1912–1972*, Wilson describes the encounter:

She looks well, as I say, and has a new distinction of dress, but she can no longer intoxicate me with her beauty or throw bombs into my soul; when I looked at her it was like staring into the center of an extinct volcano . . . but I somehow felt that, impossible and imperfect as she is, some glamour and high passion had gone out of life when my love for her died.²

Such was her effect.

Much later, two years after Millay’s death, he would write in *The Shores of Light* that, like other “romantics of the twenties,” she had a “need to heighten the sensations of life.” Wilson would not be the only one to feel the undertow she stirred.

Wilson candidly voices Millay’s potent and irresistible effect, a charm and intensity that somehow mirrored the tsunami of glamour and sexual emancipation of the Jazz Age during the

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post-World War I decade. In many ways the poet, in her nearly feral hunger for sex and unconventional experience, embodied this period. From 1919 to 1928, Millay published six volumes of poetry: *Renascence and Other Poems* (1917); *A Few Figs From Thistles* (1920); *Second April* (1921); *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver* (1922), for which she won the Pulitzer Prize; and *The Buck in the Snow* (1928). Each collection contained lyrical poems and sonnets of oftentimes risqué, bold subject matter, preying on conventional gender expectations of the times. “Grown-up,” from her second book, is a representative early poem:

Was it for this I uttered prayers,
And sobbed and cursed and kicked the stairs,
That now, domestic as a plate,
I should retire at half-past eight?

Not surprisingly, her poems resonated with the 1920s and ’30s audiences—they flocked to see this petite, coy, and sexually notorious young woman who lucidly and wittily articulated their unexpressed selves. She became a legend in her own lifetime, a siren for her Jazz-era generation, a lyrical wordsmith with a poetic ferocity, a scandalous tone, and an eye for the flora and fauna in nature, which included the male and female fauna who ended up in her bed. National fascination for Millay prompted her to tour the country off and on for the next two decades. She was the Lady Gaga of her day, beguiling sold-out audiences at venues such as the Hollywood Bowl, reciting her poems in long flowing magenta, burgundy, and green silk robes, scarves, and ornate cloches—some of which are on display at the Millay Steepletop House and Museum in upstate New York.

Millay’s ascent perhaps foreshadows an almost Fitzgeraldian fall from literary and personal grace. By the early forties, Millay’s work was considered passé, old-fashioned, out of tune with new modernist poetry. She published two volumes of pro-American, anti-Nazi poems that, in a sense, sealed her critical poetic fate: *Make Bright the Arrows* and *The Murder of Lidice*. This work was almost universally panned, sending Millay into an emotional, spiritual, and financial tailspin from which she never really recovered. In 1923, she’d married a wealthy Dutch businessman twelve years her senior, Eugen Boissevain, and they remained lifelong partners—as long as he tolerated her affairs, including one that lasted decades with a much younger fellow poet with whom she became obsessed during a 1928 reading tour in Chicago.

Many years after his futile courting of Millay in Truro, Edmund Wilson, now one of America’s preeminent literary critics, went to see the woman who had so dazzled him—once in 1929 at her farm in Austerlitz, New York, and again in 1948, one year before Millay’s husband died of complications following surgery for lung cancer, and two years before her own death. In the nineteen years since he had last seen her, the poet had become addicted to morphine following a car accident and dependent on alcohol.

He drove up to Steepletop and was stunned by Millay’s transformation, not recognizing at first the jowly, bloated figure coming across the living room between the two grand pianos and stacks of books. After several martinis brought in on a tray by Gene, Millay’s husband, their mutual nervousness dissolved and Millay began reading a poem. Wilson was overcome by emotion, and by the force of her personality, and soon found an excuse to end the visit. He wouldn’t see her alive again. In *The Shores of Light* he recalls the visit:

So she was still, although now in a different way, almost as disturbing to me as she had ever been in the twenties, to which she had so completely belonged—for she could not be a part of my present, and to see her exerted on me a painful pull, as if to drag me up by the roots, to gouge me out of my present personality and to annihilate all that had made it.³

For Wilson, the “extinct volcano” of 1921 still smoldered, threatening to unravel his intellectual fortitude. She still had that power, even in decline.

THE MILLAY I WAS searching for in Truro was a younger one, before morphine syringes, gin rickeys, and barbiturates left her at a self-destructive wrack-line, finally taking her in 1950, when she was found at the foot of her staircase at Steepletop by a devoted handyman. Out of my abiding interest in her life and poetry, I wanted to sleuth out the place where she’d sojourned during that long-ago summer.

From Edmund Wilson’s reminiscences, I knew that the rustic cottage had stood on Higgins Hollow Road, which is south of and roughly parallel to the present Longnook Road. I went to the Truro Historical Museum and studied property records, but quickly came to the realization that most of the houses on the road were and are historic. The museum referred me to the Cobb Memorial Library, where a patient research librarian brought out stacks of records. The dates of the cottages were there, along with lists of the original inhabitants, but again there was no link to Cook and Glaspell. Similarly, searches on the database at the Barnstable registry of deeds yielded nothing but hours of digital frustration. This went on for days. Then weeks.

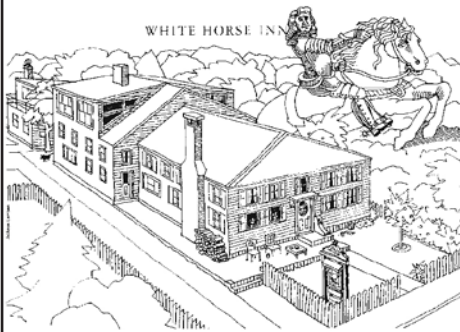
In the meantime, I went to the Prov-

incetown Public Library, where, in a second-floor research room of local subjects, I found three first- and second-edition volumes of Millay’s poetry. Each thin book was handsomely bound in blue cloth, delicate beige pages with words in lucid typescript, and on the inside frontispiece was the Harper & Brothers Publisher imprint. In a sense, the volumes connected me to the Jazz period, and rereading the poems drew me closer

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The house on Higgins Hollow Road



The Cook/Glaspell house where the Millays stayed in Truro, circa 1920

to Millay's lexical and artistic consciousness; I felt her inexorable pull, as though she wanted to be sought out, discovered, known. Her voice in the poems was actual, fresh, and present.

At an impasse in my search, I drove down Higgins Hollow Road, passing the four most likely houses—the ones that the records revealed had been there since the early 1800s. All were clapboard, Greek Revival, or Cape Cod-style homes, nestled back in shady trees, hedges, and blossoming flower gardens.

Ninety-five years is a long time. Was it even possible to find tangible evidence or a relic of Edna St. Vincent Millay in the wooded tangles and sandy hollows of Truro?

One morning I woke at six thirty and drove down Longnook Road, all the way to the National Seashore parking lot. The bare bluff afforded me sweeping views of Longnook Beach and the Atlantic. I encouraged myself with the thought that even if I was chasing a bohemian ghost, the trade-off in terms of elemental beauty was well worth it. I began traipsing down the fire road, with thick green oak, shadbush, pitch pine, and locust woods on both sides. I arrived at a fork and went up a paved section, which wound up the hill, soon coming to a large clearing. At the edge were the dun cliffs slanting down to the vast, calm, blue Atlantic. To the north were more sharply sheared bluffs, alluvial sculptures of the last glaciers. The color contrasts were striking: crisp azure sky, white sand, and bright-green vegetation—the incredible,

vibrant palette of Cape Cod that has drawn painters for centuries. I imagined that Edna and Edmund had walked to this spot, and it was probably where the Millays cut through to Longnook Beach.

I could picture the sun-freckled poet in a thin summer dress, pockets filled with seashells, berries, and flowers, her bobbed nest of hair red fire against the scalding dunes, the air rife with mollusky brine. I recalled, as I looked down on Longnook Beach and the New England ocean, a poem she had written in 1922—"Memory of Cape Cod," which memorialized her visit to the Cape—when Cora had taken her to England to help her abort an unwanted pregnancy:

The wind in the ash-tree sounds like surf on the shore at Truro.

I will shut my eyes . . . hush, be still with your silly bleating, sheep on Shillingstone Hill . . .

They said: Come along! They said: Leave your pebbles on the sand and come along, it's long after sunset!

The mosquitoes will be thick in the pine-woods along by Long Nook, the wind's died down!

They said: Leave your pebbles on the sand, and your shells, too, and come along, we'll find you another beach like the beach at Truro.

Let me listen to wind in the ash . . . it sounds like surf on the shore.⁴

A few days after my visit to Longnook Beach, I received an e-mail from Chuck Steinman, chair of the Truro Historical Commission, who was forwarding me an e-mail from a woman, a local historian, who'd lived at 19 Higgins Hollow Road. She had run into the current owner of another house on the road, who confirmed that it was in *his* house that Millay had stayed, and that at the time it was certainly one that Susan Glaspell and Jig Cook owned. *The Road to the Temple*, Glaspell's 1927 hybrid autobiography and biography of her husband, who died in Greece in 1924, dispelled the fog. In essence, the house was intended as a rental, a type of bohemian dune shack:

We had two Truro houses. They had been for sale at the same time, and cheap, for this was abandoned land; Jig said we could rent the other one to friends, or let them have it

if they couldn't pay rent, and that might be the beginning of a community over there.⁵

I contacted the owner of the second house owned by Cook and Glaspell, and, four days later, on a rainy Tuesday, made my way from Wellfleet to Truro, down Longnook to Higgins Hollow Road, close to the completion of my quest. I made the turn at a rutted sandy driveway and came face to face with the house I'd been seeking for all these months. It was a moderate-size Colonial with dark-reddish siding and a white-trim porch surrounded by deciduous trees and pitch pines.

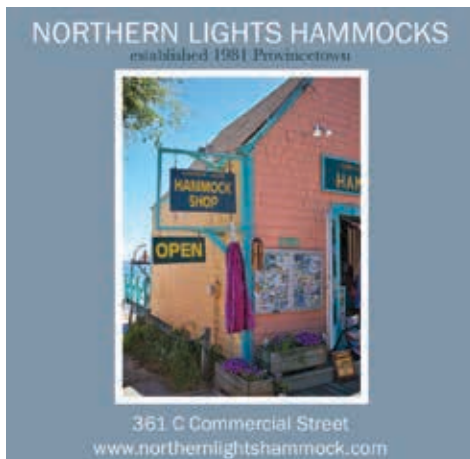
The owner, Paul, greeted me on the porch and showed me inside, explaining that many renovations had taken place through the years. We walked into a spacious kitchen, then into an extension that dipped down into a cozy den/living room with broad bay windows overlooking bird feeders, a swath of lawn, and woods. The place had a warm, rustic elegance, and the walls were adorned with paintings. Paul pointed out the dimensions of the 1920 house and where the additions began.

"This is the original floor," he explained, pointing out the wood floorboards of polished yellow pine. "Pumpkin pine they call it."

I saw the narrow staircase that Millay had walked down in the morning, to sit on the floor and recite new poems by memory for the entranced Wilson. And there was the small brick fireplace that had warmed the Millays on cold Truro nights.

Paul showed me a small three-by-four, black-and-white photograph of a barren hill with fields, scrubby trees, a fence in the foreground, and two houses—a small cottage in the left foreground and, beyond it, perched on a bare knoll, a small, white, two-story house with a front porch, very utilitarian and isolated. It had been taken around 1920, about the same time as Millay's stay. I could make out Smalls Hill in the distance, as well as the topographical fold of Higgins Hollow.

The image revealed just how much Truro has changed, and the juxtaposition was startling: open grazing land punctuated with low dark trees, a stark house bleached white as a quahog shell. Millay's descriptions in her correspondence to Allan Macdougall of the



surrounding hills being “nothing but overgrown sand-dunes with a bit o’ green on” bear little resemblance to the thick woods of today. No neighbors could now see the Millay sisters beneath a flowing spout.

Shelves in the den of the current house were lined with Cape authors, including an entire shelf devoted to Edna St. Vincent Millay, and we talked of her, rain keeping up a steady syn-copation on the roof, a stormy Cape day. As I drove away, I was glad that it was Paul who owned the house, and that he was aware of its literary heritage and of the poetic luminary who had stayed there in its plain rooms so many years before. I thought Millay would be pleased if she saw what had become of the house, how he knew her work, and how well the house was kept up.

OF COURSE, ninety-five years after Millay’s visit to Truro any traces of her presence on Cape Cod have been quickly and omnivorously erased by the elements. Winter gales scour the dunes, clusters of elderberry, wild rose, and bullbrier grow anew, and wispy skate egg cases crackle and snag in the dry straw. Any slight footprints Millay may have made as she traipsed and explored the dunes have vanished. The melodious trill of her voice is long gone, unless, like surf sounds, they are preserved in moon snail and whelk shells. Hiking in Higgins Hollow, I had imagined her way up ahead of me on the fire road, turning to say or show me something, then bounding off into the green woods, the hem of her summer dress sparking in the sun for an instant.

In the end, what did it matter whether or not I found a trace of Edna St. Vincent Millay in Truro? Would it shed light on her poetry and life? Would it humanize her? Would a fleeting glimpse make her any less elusive?

In a way, it did.

I could almost see and hear Vincent, Norma, and Kathleen tracking fine sand grains on the floorboards; Edna at the foot of the stairs reciting some new poems she was working on; Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony wheezing from the Victrola; Edna warbling the Estonian folk song for a transfixed Edmund; and Cora occasionally making a ribald observation, while an oil lamp illuminated volumes of poetry and simple meals.

There is something about Edna St. Vincent Millay’s story that continues to fascinate me, a courage and a pathos that is simultaneously fragile, unnerving, and modern. The *literary lioness*—a sobriquet given to her by scholars—was also rife with contradictions, all of which make her startlingly human and accessible.

There’s a saying that you die three times: when your heart stops, when other relatives pass, and the final time, when your name is no longer spoken. By this standard, Edna St. Vincent Millay is alive and well: At Steeple-top, which is not only a museum dedicated to Millay’s life and work, but also the site of the Millay Colony for the Arts—a place for writers and poets to go and work. In the words written by those who loved her. In her eternally human

poetry. And, remarkably enough, on the dunes of the Outer Cape. ▣

WILLIAM BLESS is the author of two collections of short stories. His fiction, poetry, and essays have been published in many journals and periodicals, including the Culture-ist, Litchfield Magazine, Vermont Literary Review, Lunarosity, Hudson Valley Echoes, Voices, America’s Civil War, and the Iconoclast Literary Journal. He is currently at work on a novel. He teaches writing at Naugatuck Valley Community College, spending part of each season in Wellfleet and Provincetown.

NOTES:

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5. Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1927).

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Naomi Feigelson Chase

PHOTO BY CLAUDIA GOLDSTEIN

Naomi Feigelson Chase

A BODY OF POETRY ABOUT THE BODY

By Denise Duhamel

NAOMI FEIGELSON CHASE'S poems inhabit the bodies of women, telling the stories of those who have been exploited, commercialized, politicized, and radicalized. Her seriously playful chapbook *Stacked* (Garden Street Press, 1998) is dedicated to the Venus of Willendorf, a Paleolithic statuette of a full-figured female. This tells you a lot about Chase—her references, her sly diplomacy. Her long lush poem defends plush female bodies, including that of the “stacked” narrator, who has been objectified since she was young. Chase invokes the Goddess of Ur and “flawed pagans like me who can’t stomach / Weight Watchers or, Goddess forbid, Eaters Anonymous.” The chapbook is a gem, and cleverly illustrated by Jon Agee.

In her first book, *Listening for Water* (Archival Press, 1980), the beach is a prominent theme, as is the sexual revolution. But her “Fire Island” is not Frank O’Hara’s Fire Island. While O’Hara’s poems contain a wild freedom, Chase’s poems are domestic, the “wild” in her imagination. Chase’s early poems commune with the world, but they are always looking at the self, what Mary Daly calls part of the Looking Glass Society, in which women’s bodies are constantly on display. While Chase’s female characters are very much her subjects, they cannot help but also be gazed-upon objects. In her “Fire Island,” the shifting sandbar and sagging dune fence inspire the speaker to glue shells “around my mirror, /

framing my summer face,” perhaps as a way to ward off aging. In “At the Beach,” we see “girls with mirrors in their minds.” Bodies are barely covered in a G-string, “buttocks-length dress,” or “see-through jumpsuit.” At a party, at the invitation of the jumpsuited woman, “[t]he men go after her with flashlights.” Chase negotiates the humor of the situation while acknowledging the sting of the intrusion. In another poem, “Music Mother,” the speaker reminisces about her “blue-stockings” piano teacher. Though the young girl doesn’t understand this phrase—her teacher “wears / ordinary nylons on her bony knees”—the speaker in the poem grows to appreciate and understand her teacher’s intellectual prowess.

In “A Life of Desire,” the opening poem in *Waiting for the Messiah in Somerville, Mass.* (Garden Street Press, 1993), Chase again features a mirror, this time in the context of a wedding experience with the corporeal. The speaker says of her reflection, “My old glass / eyes me with half a century’s ruts, / evidence God is truly a woman.” In other poems, Chase invokes Christian saints through the lens of persona, each woman exceedingly aware of her body. Saint Catherine of Siena says, “I am pale and have no special beauty.” Mary Magdalene has a rash. Venus becomes a hairdresser. The poem “Dissatisfaction” begins with the speaker’s lament, “It’s never right, I tell myself, setting my body / against some ideal Greek. . . .”

This human / humane sentiment is empowering in its candor, the brilliant blending of acuity and longing. In “I Can Tell You Now,” a speaker confesses to her dead beloved:

I can tell you now, I never expected this—
to be old and ugly
to turn away from the beach
to struggle turning the lid of a jar
my sex open and shut.

The vulnerability of the stanza is astounding, even in the realm of post-confessional poetry, as is this knockout ending:

Now I know I'll die, someday be lowered
between ropes into uneven ground.
I wonder what my children will say about me,
what they'll do with my clothes.

The book-length poem *The Judge's Daughter* (Garden Street Press, 1996) is perhaps Chase's most apparently personal work. The child's world is one of right and wrong as she negotiates both her privilege and her powerlessness, once again the body paramount:

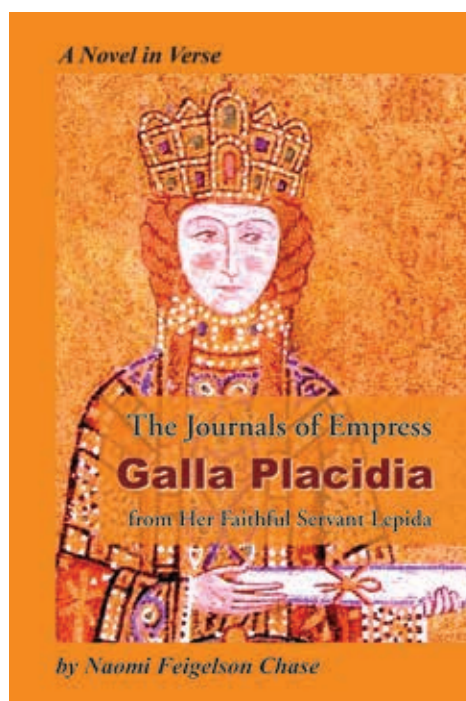
I got my first period at Sardinia.
At the table, sure everyone was staring,
I forked a poached egg over my hash,
loaded on ketchup.

And in just a few short pages, her mother goes from a glamorous socialite to a patient in a nursing home:

She rode out in a wheelchair,
a life-size cripple, bound by the belt
of her flowered house dress, the laces
of her black oxfords, her pink corset strings.

Chase skillfully acknowledges the crone contained in the virgin, the virgin in the crone. The speaker's father receives the following lines—though these words, of course, also apply to the speaker and her mother: “practicing the speech from Coriolanus, / how the parts of the body / are like the body politic.”

In *Gittel, The Would-Be Messiah: A Novel in Verse* (Turning Point, 2005), Chase leaves her autobiography behind and inhabits the fictitious Gittel, a woman chosen by God to assume the mantle of the Messiah. Messiahs and saviors are woven throughout her work, but here we see Chase make the leap she has been preparing for in previous volumes. What if the Chosen One were a young woman? The poems in *Gittel* straddle the esoteric and earthly bodies. Gittel is all girl, with the crushes of a girl. In “On the Judgment Day, Found Wanting,” when the rabbi's son smiles, “Gittel tastes his breath.” As in her other books, a mirror is prominent. In “Mirror, Mirror,” Gittel does her best to pinch her cheeks and brush her hair, but her reflection seems to mock her—“Who pretties herself for God?” Gittel considers vanity, practicality,



and work when a voice inside her says: “PUT ON YOUR DRESS. / ROUGE YOUR LIPS. / BREAK YOUR HEART.”

In *Anonymous Fox* (Turning Point, 2009), Chase returns to a blending of myth and women of the twenty-first century. The mirror appears again in “Retribution”:

This silk lie is made up as I go,
A stained wedding robe,

A red-lined cradle,
Black breath on a mirror.

Mortality and memory weigh heavy on the bodies displayed in this volume. “Our Murder” is an elegy for Mary Joe Frug, the Boston law professor who was stabbed to death in 1991. In the poem, Frug is killed a week after she and the fictional speaker have seen *The Deer Hunter*. Chase writes, “I need to know everything— / If your eyes were half open / As the papers said.” In “Mouthing Graffiti,” the speaker gets “preventative crowns, / Something gold the Queen wears, / To disguise the realm's decay.” In “Deconstruction,” she avoids a lover by pretending to be asleep on a chair, but now that same lover is dead, waiting “Still / Under your quilt of earth.” In a twist on the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus, “Eurydice Refuses” features a wife contemplating whether or not she should chase her husband into the underworld.

Chase's most recent and ambitious book, *The Journals of Empress Galla Placidia, From Her Faithful Servant Lepida: A Novel in Verse* (Turning Point, 2016), chronicles the life of the leader of the Western Roman Empire during the Theodosian dynasty. The Empress's poems work in concert with Lepida's prose poems, which interpret and annotate the entries of the only woman to have ever ruled Rome. Up

front, we are told that “Historians lie,” and Chase makes it her mission to contextualize and embellish this polyphonic telling. The mirror here is one of fierce weaponry—“A sword was her mirror.” In “The Coast, Near Naples,” the Empress observes her mother “of surpassing beauty. // What did that get her. / My father and a short life.” Gossip swirls that the Empress has an incestuous relationship with her brother, but Lepida writes that the Empress pushed him away “when he fondled her.” In “Soiled,” the Empress's entry reads:

I am soiled.
I am mud.

I am gall
And wormwood.

Once again, the body is left wanting to deteriorate at some point, the mind delegated to ponder the ethereal. In “Empty,” the Empress tries to leave behind her body entirely—“I am too empty / To cast a shadow.” Of course, she cannot escape her body. Just as we cannot escape ours. Yet in Chase's poems, these vessels are transformed from mere physical form: they are idealized, analyzed, and, most importantly, celebrated. Chase's honesty, unflinching wit, and devastating observations vibrate throughout her career as a poet. Adrienne Rich famously wrote, “The art of poetry means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage.” Chase's poems pull the tablecloth right out from under the place settings. She continues to give us delightful, intriguing, thought-provoking imagery about women and their real, historical, and mythic bodies. ▀

DENISE DUHAMEL's most recent book of poetry, *Blowout* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. The recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, Duhamel is a professor at Florida International University in Miami.

Remembering Eddie



Eddie Bonetti ALL PHOTOS BY LYNNE BURNS

NORMAN MAILER once described Edward Bonetti as “a prodigy of talent” and the “best working poet in Provincetown.” He also recognized the soul in the man: “Eddie never cut a corner on a friend,” he said of the man he considered to be one of his best friends. Al DiLauro introduced me to Eddie in the summer of 1977 at Ciro’s Flagship Bar. His book *The Wine Cellar* had just been published by Viking Press. I had never met anyone like Eddie before—and haven’t since. At that time, he had been living for more than a decade in Provincetown and Wellfleet, working hard to meet the standards he demanded of his writing. He earned his living building and fixing. He was a Renaissance man who could sing, dance, act, cook, write, prizefight, and fix anything from a toaster to a car. He even trained his five beloved cats to roll over at the same time. He is remembered for his serious sense of play, his tolerant compassion, and the lush beauty of his writing, which is evident in one of his essays about Provincetown, “Viva,” featured in these pages following this tribute to his work.

Eddie passed away in 1993. I ran into an old friend of his, Mary Ann Larkin, the summer before last. Together, we began searching for Eddie’s manuscripts, with help from Doris Kearns Goodwin and her husband, Richard Goodwin (Eddie was their son’s godfather). Patric Pepper was invaluable with editorial and computer direction.

We are grateful to everyone who helped us gather together this material, especially the contributors of the wonderful remembrances of Eddie in the following pages. Anyone who knew Edward Bonetti has “Eddie stories.” Here are a few of them.

— Lynne Burns

I REMEMBER EDDIE

By Mary Ann Larkin

I FIRST MET Edward Bonetti when I walked into the Old Colony in 1977 during a nor'easter. Accompanying me was a sexy friend, an ex-nun turned hippy, but Eddie, standing dripping in a yellow slicker, greeted us with, "What are the two of you doing, walking in here like a couple of nuns?" As we laughed and talked in amazement, Eddie went on to tell me he'd just had *The Wine Cellar* published. Jackie Onassis was his editor. "My book's in the window of the Provincetown Book Store," he said. "Oh, so is mine," I answered, "what a coincidence." The Big Mama Poetry Troupe, a feminist group of performing poets to which I belonged, had just published an anthology. "You don't believe me," he countered. It had never occurred to me not to believe him, but he was convinced I didn't. So nothing would do at the end of the evening, as he drove my friend and me back to Mrs. O'Donnell's pristine rooming house, but to look into the window of the Provincetown Book Store, where both our books rested contentedly, side by side.

For the next seven years, until he left the Cape, Eddie fixed everything at my cottage: dinners, poems, toasters, hot-water heaters, water pumps, and old cars. He took nothing in return, but one July I brought him a blueberry cobbler and, despite his resistance, I insisted on cleaning his manfully neglected bathroom. I began by emptying the room, wrapping a rag around my head, and then throwing buckets of water at the ceiling. It was enormously satisfying! When I

finished, I called Eddie in to admire his sparkling bathroom. His response: "Jesus, Mary Ann, I'm going to have to piss in the yard."

However, despite his vast generosity, the best thing Eddie ever did for me was to show me the seriousness of play. One night, after the Flagship closed, we got into his truck to drive Jimmy Randazise back to Tasha's Cottages. Eddie's fertile mind hatched a plan. "Listen," Eddie told me. "You stand at the bottom of the hill here between the cottages, and after I drop Jimmy off, I'm going to rev the truck down toward you. Wrap your sweater up like it's a baby. When you hear me coming, step into my headlights and yell, 'A boon, sir, a boon.'" "Splendid, Eddie, splendid," said Jimmy in his most professorial voice. Hopping from the truck and cradling my sweater-baby, I did as instructed. "A boon, sir," echoed above the revving motor as Eddie blared down the hill.

The cottages lit up: "Jesus, there's a woman out there with a baby." "What the fuck's going on?" "Somebody call the rescue squad." And then, between Tasha's leaning cottages housing the weary, the revelers, and the workers, reality dawned: "Ah, it's just Eddie." "Fuck off, Eddie. We gotta go to work in the morning." Doors slammed as, horn beeping, motor roaring, we skidded away over the gravel, helpless with laughter. For me, Eddie's prank that night ripped the scrim off what passes for an ordinary life. ❧

MY NEIGHBOR EDDIE

By Jerry Thompson

IN THE FALL OF 1967, my wife, Judy, and I rented an apartment on the second floor of the building on Commercial Street where Fanizzi's Restaurant is now located. Eddie Bonetti, whom I had known for five or six years, occupied the apartment next to us. He was locally well known for his poetry and fiction writing and was also considered a talented actor, a very good cook, and an accomplished auto mechanic who enjoyed a few pops of booze from time to time. Eddie was a prankster who loved to improvise, to create dramatic scenes anywhere, at any time, no matter how small his audience.

One late evening, after having a few drinks with friends at the Old Colony Tap, Judy and I were walking back to our apartment in a thick, milky fog, listening to the mournful sound of the Long Point foghorn and the waves caressing the bulkheads that protected the houses along the beach. As we approached our apartment house, a dynamic baritone voice boomed out. It was Eddie Bonetti reciting the last four lines of one of his poems: "When the hawk claws the moon in crude rebellion / When the glamorous die / And Ahab's eyes like quarters stare / Through the whale-struck wires of the sea . . ." He stopped and called out to us, "Hey, Jerry, Judy, I'm up on the roof. I feel like a fuck'n ghost up here. Isn't it a beautiful night?"

He invited us to join him for dinner at his apartment the following evening. The next afternoon, at about four o'clock, I was in our kitchen when I heard a horn blow down in the parking lot. I looked out the window and saw Eddie

in his Chevrolet with a young woman sitting beside him. (Eddie had three 1950 Chevrolets, the one he drove, and the two he used for spare parts to keep his working car on the road.) I opened the kitchen window and he shouted up to me, "This is Alice. I just met her—she was hitchhiking on Route 6 in Truro so I gave her a ride into town. She's going to have dinner with us tonight." His car lurched forward and smashed into one of the broken-down Chevrolets. Alice's head bounced back from the impact. She said nothing but I could imagine what she was thinking. Eddie backed up and shouted to me, "I'm going to the A&P to get some anchovies and some garlic. Do we need another bottle of wine?" Before I could answer, his car lurched forward again and smashed into the other Chevrolet. Eddie backed up as I called out, "Yes, buy another bottle. It won't go to waste." Eddie shouted, "Okay, I'll see you in about a half an hour." With that, he pulled out of the parking lot and drove away.

All I can remember about the evening was six or seven of us drinking wine and laughing while eating Eddie's delicious signature recipe: pasta with a simmered sauce made up of olive oil, garlic, red pepper, anchovies, lemon juice, parsley, and Romano cheese. The meal was followed by Eddie giving ballet lessons to Alice. He said to her, "It's all in the hands," as he delicately turned his hands in graceful circles. He concluded the lesson by performing a death-defying ballet split leap.

The ballet lesson was followed by a séance led by Eddie. ❧

EDDIE—A MEMORY

By Michael Lee

*"We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master."
— Ernest Hemingway*

I FIRST SAW HIM in Wellfleet, walking briskly with a small duct-taped case that was just large enough to contain either an Uzi or a trumpet. He had a purposeful gait, as though he were on the way to the bank to collect an approved loan. Some days later, we were introduced at a spaghetti dinner he was cooking at Peter Frawley's house. I say cooking, but it was more a culinary blitzkrieg. A constant cigarette dangled from his lips, the long ash teetering over a bubbling pot, and flecks of ruddy sauce splattered the stove and wall. You became freckled with the sting of sauce if you stood next to him during the frenzied stirrings.

His name was Eddie Bonetti, and he cooked and talked as he walked, with an urgent relentlessness. And he was a uniquely wonderful writer of short stories and poems. His problem with literary matters was that he was a perfectionist.

There are plenty of characters on the Outer Cape, but not all have character. Eddie had more than his share. We became friends as the season moved into winter. Virtually every morning around nine, I heard a tapping at the kitchen door, and within a half hour, a cobalt cloud of mentholated cigarette smoke hung a foot below the ceiling. Eddie would open his famous satchel and, instead of a weapon or an instrument, out came reams of paper. Most were works in progress, but some were complete short stories that he would read to me in his staccato voice. He loved to show me the flattering letter from Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Eddie's editor at Viking.

Opinions of his work mattered greatly to Eddie, but the verdict he valued above all was Norman Mailer's. He and Mailer became good friends and sparring partners during Eddie's days in Provincetown.



"I think it's time you met the old man," he said to me one morning.

That was Eddie's term for Mailer when Mailer wasn't in the room. We climbed into Eddie's car, an old low-slung Ford that he kept running despite the vehicle's many objections and emissions. Careening rapidly on Route 6 in Truro, Eddie dipped into a bag of Red Man tobacco and jammed a gigantic chaw into his mouth. He set an empty coffee can on the transmission hump between us. Every few minutes, Eddie hocked a revolting brown lunger into the can. The car began to stink. By the time we reached the Truro-Provincetown line, it was half full of salivated Red Man and my gag reflexes kicked in. Eddie ignored my retching and told me the story of boxing the great Willie Pep when they were both in the Golden Gloves tournament.

"He kicked my ass," Eddie said, "but he knew he was in a fight. I tagged him a few times." Then Eddie threw a right hook toward the rearview mirror. He had fast hands.

In Provincetown, we took the left turn at the juncture of east Commercial Street and Bradford. That was when the coffee can tipped over, drenching my left sneaker.

"Jesus Christ, Eddie," I hollered, as the juice soaked through.

We pulled up to Mailer's big brick house. Eddie looked at my sneaker and said, "Ah, don't worry about it, Norman won't care."

I squished and gagged my way up to the front door. Mailer opened it and grinned at Eddie; their affection for each other was obvious.

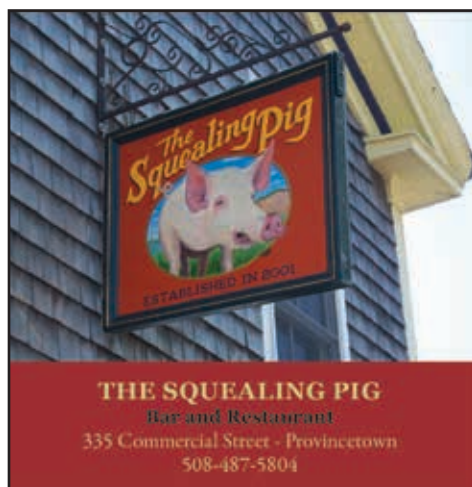
"What the hell's that smell?" he asked me, shaking my hand.

"Oh, Mike's got bad habits," Eddie told him. And so began my thirty-year friendship with Norman, always the smartest guy in the room. Later that afternoon, Eddie and Mailer squared off in a friendly joust. They both had fast hands and laughed as one grazed the other with an open palm. It was the first of many trips Eddie and I took to Mailer's house. And I always kept my shoes crammed toward the door when Eddie dipped.

When Eddie died in 1993, Norman and I drove up to Dorchester for the funeral and talked about him. Eddie was notorious for perfecting a sentence, then a paragraph, before continuing on. His published output was two books and he died while working on a novel.

"Eddie could have been a great writer," Mailer said, "really a great one. But he just couldn't defeat his demons. He couldn't get over the idea to push ahead and go back later for the polish. It would grind him to a halt."

On the way home, we talked less. Mailer was working on *Harlot's Ghost* and asked me if I had ever been in the brig when I was in the Marine Corps. He was toying with the idea of Oswald and homosexuality in confinement. I couldn't help him there and we fell into a silence. It was as though something special had been taken from our lives. And I can't help but think Mailer felt that as well. Eddie's silence seemed so inappropriate. ▀



REMEMBERING EDWARD “BUNZO” BONETTI

By James Hobin

EDWARD BONETTI did a lot of things well, from fixing an engine to fixing a meal, but mostly he was a good writer. He hammered out his stories and poems on a noisy manual typewriter and took his work with him wherever he went, carrying the manuscripts in a small, beat-up suitcase that had once belonged to his father, an Italian immigrant who used it to hold the makeup kit that he needed for performing in vaudeville.

Ed Bonetti grew up in Savin Hill, a tightly knit neighborhood in working-class Dorchester. When I was a boy, I heard neighbors talking about Eddie, the guy who lived in Wellfleet, wherever that was, and was a poet, a word that was equally mysterious to my young mind. I suppose it's possible that his early example planted the seed in my unconscious that germinated into the desire to become an artist myself.

I met Eddie in 1985, in Wellfleet of all places, and we became friends. Later, when he moved back to Savin Hill, I saw him often, especially near the end when he was ill. Due to the chemotherapy treatments, Eddie had lost his hair, and with his head bald and shiny, he kept asking, “How do I look, Jimbo?” “Like a newborn babe,” I would answer. We laughed. Eddie wasn't what you would call morose, but he wasn't immune to occasional attacks of regret.

On one particular afternoon, I climbed the stairs to his apartment and found him seated in the kitchen, hunched over the table, staring intently at the contours of two books. In his right hand was his book *The Wine Cellar*, his left hand held the Edith Wharton book *Ethan Frome*.

The covers were peeled back and Eddie gripped the wedges of paper from each book between the thumb and forefinger of each hand. His head turned from left to right and back again as he compared the amount of pages stitched to the spines of the books. Suddenly, he half-rose from his seat, slammed the books on the table, and shouted, “I've wasted my life!”

Eddie was a scrapper who tried to expiate his rage by struggling with the written word. He once told me that he had spent countless hours writing mostly useless poetry, which he eventually rejected and disposed of. Yet, somehow it seems of more importance that a poem is written than that it is read. So perhaps Eddie hadn't wasted his time. It was the act of writing that had made him a writer in the first place, even if it hadn't made him many poems.



Eddie Bonetti descending imaginary stairs - He kept drinks going in five bars at a time while he called the Taj Mahal collect.

An excerpt from *The History of Provincetown* by Susan Baker, artist, book-maker, and owner of the Susan Baker Memorial Museum in North Truro, Massachusetts.

Trying to encapsulate Eddie's writing career puts me in mind of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, by Rainer Maria Rilke. In them, there is a passage about the difficulties of self-expression: “One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life if possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten good lines.”

Ed Bonetti's life had some sweetness, but it wasn't a long life. Still, he managed to write ten good lines—and then some. ▀

EDDIE MOONWALKED INTO OUR LIVES

By Peter Scarbo Frawley

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP in Dorchester, I was a part of a gang of kids called the Falcons. Children, hanging out on the corners. Standing. Spitting. When we were about fifteen, we began to hear about a guy from St. William's Parish in Savin Hill who would go into Eddie Connors's bar, hop up on the bar, shut off the TV, and announce to all the drinkers that he was “gonna read some poetry,” and if they didn't like it, tough shit, they could meet him outside and fight him. We didn't know this guy's name. We knew nothing about him, except that he had balls! So, we went looking for a fight. He inspired us. As we grew older, we heard these stories more and more, and each one contained a little bit more about him. This poet was a Golden Gloves boxer, described by two-time featherweight champion Willie Pep as “a

natural.” Then we heard that he was a friend of Norman Mailer's. I was reading Mailer's *The White Negro* at the time. When years later I finally met Eddie Bonetti in person, I said, “I've heard about you.” He said to me, “I've heard about you.” We shook hands and talked to each other as if we had known each other all our lives. We became friends.

Later, he moonwalked, literally, into my family's heart. We came to know his favorite expressions. He often introduced himself by saying, “Bonetti with two t's.” His best advice was “Always lead with your left,” and “Never lose your sense of humor.” And the word *However* was something Eddie said as a lead into winning an argument.

Eddie was a good fighter. Tough. Intelligent. Quick on his feet, like a tap dancer.

Lickety-split with his left jab. Feet planted solidly on the ground when he threw his right. He was a smart fighter—both physically and verbally. He would gently defeat his opponents by repeating their arguments, setting them up the way Marvin Hagler used to do, letting them think he was agreeing with them, seducing them with the false smell of victory—and then came *However* like a sucker punch. Eddie told me that everything Willie Pep said about him was true, but that he, Eddie, didn't have the killer instinct. Eddie's cut man, Leo “The Giant” Pratt, said of Eddie that he was a natural boxer and had the best moves he'd seen. Eddie was good and he knew he was good. Still, it was a deep sorrow and anger to Eddie that his father never came to see him fight.

PLANS FOR THE NEXT WAR

NEAR THE END of Eddie's final bout, his fight with cancer, Doris and Dick Goodwin got him into an experimental treatment program at the Boston Medical Center. I had been staying some with Eddie at that time, going to and from the Cape. He asked me one day to go with him to the medical center, and, of course, I went. We arrived and went deep into the bowels of the hospital. It seemed barely lit, and it felt as if we were surrounded by a giant machine. We could feel the pressure of the building, and there was a vibrational hum everywhere. We went through a pair of swinging doors and passed by a small waiting room with four couples sitting silently. Silently. Four bald people and four escorts, who were, I guess, like myself. It was like a wake.

Eddie went to the reception desk with his famous black briefcase, which he was seen with almost anywhere. I carried his coat and hat into the waiting room and sat down with the downcast. As I said, it felt like a wake. A few minutes later, I heard a very official-sounding voice saying, "Attention. Attention. Attention." I knew it was Eddie's voice. So I looked up to see Eddie moonwalking in front of us, his black briefcase held with both hands and tucked up under his chin. He looked like Mussolini with peach fuzz on his head. He stopped right in front of us all, there in the waiting room, paused, raised his briefcase, showed it around to everyone and said very seriously, "Plans for the next war." Then he sat down and everyone cracked up. They were all laughing. One lady with peach fuzz on her head was crying, she was so happy. Eddie said, "I'm Eddie Bonetti, with two t's." We all began talking to each other. They didn't talk about the plans, and they didn't talk about their troubles. It was regular talk, like, "Where are you from? Do you know so-and-so?" It was beautiful.

It wasn't long after I went to the medical center with Eddie that I was contacted on the Cape by Pauline, who had cared for Eddie at the end. Eddie had died. She had placed his black briefcase at the foot of his bed. I'm sure it contained plans for his next war. Eddie himself gave us his epitaph:

I fought the best I could
against the demons I had.
My only regret is
I let my teeth go bad.

Even more revealing of Eddie's nature was something his friend Jimmy Randazise told me Eddie had said: "I accept this miserable disease, this cancer, but I won't be defeated by it." Though Eddie doesn't call me anymore, and I never hear him say *However*, I still hear his name, all the time, from family, friends, acquaintances: "Remember the time Eddie..." So, somehow, I believe he really wasn't defeated in the end, either by his demons or by his disease. ▣



Going Somewhere

By Mary Ann Larkin

Has anyone written of Pauline,
that tiny tank of a nurse,
the one who sat behind Eddie
in third grade,
the one with the silky pigtails
who couldn't spell,
the one he lost track of
when they both lost track
of whatever it was
they were supposed to remember.

Has anyone told,
after fifty years drifted by
the slow way the morning fog
lifts off the pond,
how Pauline barreled into Eddie's room,
to pull up the blinds,
and shoo away the dust
that comes with dying,
to make him a bed of snowy sheets.
And, though he protested weakly,
to wash him clean, and say
she wasn't going anywhere.

And when, with all her doing,
she could not stop his trembling
and his fear,
has it been set down anywhere
how Pauline climbed
into Eddie's clean-sheeted bed
to hold close
in her strong plump arms
his beautiful head,
his slack-skinned flesh,
to rock him on out
as far as she could go,
beyond third grade
and the lives they lived
and the lives they hadn't lived
and the ones they wished
they hadn't lived.

Has anyone told,
does anyone know,
what kind of love that is?

CONTRIBUTORS

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JERRY THOMPSON's plays have been produced in theaters nationally, including eighteen short plays produced by the Provincetown Theater. He has written four full-length plays: *Hello, I'm Will Shakespeare*, *Eddy and Benny*, *High Head*, and *First Dance*, which was produced by the Provincetown Theater in 2010. Jerry lives with his wife, Judy, in Truro.

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PETER SCARBO FRAWLEY, a former two-year Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center, is a concrete poet and performer living in Wellfleet. He recently sold several pieces of his work to a MoMA board member.

Viva

By Edward Bonetti

THE NIGHT WAS living on its toes in Provincetown, dancing high over the wide sky of Commercial Street, lit for the pirouettes of the zany, the gay, the tourists and dreamers, soaring into a weekend of life and jazz and a slow kind of comfortable drowning in the not yet honky-tonk fever and glint of Middle America. We had arrived on the spur of those unforgettable moments fed by destiny or chance—or, if not this, then it was a moment fed by the options that lay hidden somehow in psychic choice: a subliminal dream of love and excitement for whatever human touch we imagined secretly to be at the end of the reach.

It was 1959 and the early years of William Ward's *Provincetown Review*, and the personalities included Daniel Banko (*Not Dead Yet*), Harriet Sohmers, Ernesto and the long-legged jovial Buster Olafson and John Thomas, Mailer, pondering his breakthrough again into literary heights, and some whose names lie in the tomb of one's mind. And yes, it was the last year allotted to Harry Kemp, Poet of the Dunes, about whom this short critique will strain to elucidate, given the doubts that one has about his own nature when laboring to define the character of another. So it will be short, for space demands it, and the dimensions of Kemp as man and poet are too complex for one who knew him only as a symbol of all that was loved in Provincetown: the lead actor in my own play of dreams, the kind Shaman who lived in the dunes and whose way of life filled the well of my own innocence with envy—yes, envy—for his slow human melodies and scents of old Bohemia.

I had met Harry Kemp four or five times, but on each occasion the man behind the mask was elusive as a fly. In his presence you listened and held back the probes of your interest that might have touched the real center of his personality, a privilege reserved only for the elite, his coteries, or for no one. To consider Kemp a great poet is a matter of choice. To consider him an artist is no choice at all: it is a necessity annealed from his act of life. And if romance lies on the other side

of reality as the common stock of good human beings live it, then in the classic sense he was the true romantic. The drift of his poetry was always upward, reaching a hand to the heavens of one's soul. But to find the seed of Kemp's own furies in his work—and who is without furies who takes quill to paper—is hopeless. So my judgment here is optional, but I'll take the option in good stead and compare him to the inward journey taken by his friend O'Neill, a poet whose gifts are unavoidably pointed to the inside of one's reality, and it took O'Neill most of his life to get on the inside of himself, or at least expose his judgments made on personal conflict that was the nut-meat of his drama, his dialectic. Kemp sang the celebration of his dream while O'Neill brooded on the edge of the abyss.

Yes, the last time I saw Harry Kemp the night was dancing and flying to heaven in the Old Colony. Kemp sat at the table with no less than six young beauties admiring his output. They could see that shadow of soul in Kemp that only the feminine eye could reach. They, like all of us, were enthralled by the man and poem mixed. Yes, the night was living on its toes and Kemp

was part of that electric urge, despite his bad leg and his old age. His play was on, and I wondered what it was in the teeth of history that had ordained this man-poet of dunes with grace, or the human lie that endows greatness to some who never wished it or who fight it off whatever else might burn inside of them. I sat and looked into his kind, old face and felt the presence of one who had gone the limit with style and whose style was now irrevocably infused with the labor to keep it going until death made its cleavage from the living and, once dead, so too the secret that gave it force. If art is somehow rooted in the romance of the living, then to know Kemp was to know life as art. O'Neill, on the other hand, either by choice or by the pull of spirit yet untouched by the analytical probe, left Provincetown for the same reason that might have kept the Poet of the Dunes polarized here as a celebrity of outward color. O'Neill feared the celebration that gradually engulfed Kemp in an aura of priesthood on whose shoulders sat both the muse and the anti-muse.

Passion given up is passion that never illuminates the other; both are jealous of the same



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Provincetown Arts Press

Silent No More

EDITED BY PETER SAUNDERS, PhD

"This is an important and beautiful book about continuing, about opening up to possibility, and giving voice to budding poets. The fact that these 'budding poets' are all senior citizens only gives greater depth to Peter Saunders's wonderful project. . . .

Silent No More should be in every single assisted living facility, every senior community library, every senior center, and nursing home. "

—LIZ ROSENBERG

editor of *Roots & Flowers:*
Poets and Poems on Family

Silent No More

UNLOCKING VOICES OF OLDER POETS



EDITED BY PETER SAUNDERS, PhD

light. Kemp balanced or unbalanced the scales. Who really knows? Only he did, or perhaps that knowledge came on those precise and sometimes frightening moments when one's head first touches the pillow at night. His passion for life was given up to life. He was the last of the classic romantics to move over these streets. His poetry, like O'Neill's plays, starts at the same point: To order fantasy in the loneliness of arrogant definition without standard in a world they were never part of. They are sightseers both and harbingers of truth. And if deprivation is the source of the deepest insights, for the poet, his craft denies that leap. Kemp had then, when I met him, the innocence of virginity and a flare for verbal promiscuity. Whatever trick of the human trade one has in his toolbox, or in the craft of his personality, it was all there full to the hilt in Kemp as I knew him. It was there, indeed, and it was a craft, and it was beautiful in the deepest sense of whatever hope lingers on the edge of the brain of one who needed to love.

So that trip to P-town in the late fifties was ordained by the good muse of destiny. I had met the Poet of the Dunes at the end of my reach. The touch was physically slight but the image went deeper than subliminal dreams. Kemp still walks in the mist of one's thoughts, a gunnysack over his shoulder, limping into the night. Romantic? Yes, romance of life, and possibly the killer of the dream. It is the trigger on the brain that haunts the present, or draws the future into the mold of the present, draws it to the self—sometimes too close to the actual abyss of the self—so that time becomes style and life becomes a living rose; the open heart of one's inner life that no one sees, a purpose in itself indeed of rich blood and rarity of beauty given to it by the grace of old age and time gone by; yes, given to it by the zap of the romantic who never touches the core of life but lingers on: the dirty old man of eternal love. Harry, a little bit of time left over, living his life as art, a dangerous game to aggravate the muse, and yet the only game perhaps for real poets of the dream, the poet-actor who lives behind the mask with the presage of his own history, and the bones of memory dance in the legends of the living who give it voice. Kemp, a true genius of the fruit . . . and the fruit was love. ❧

Editor's Note: This story of the ethos of the late fifties in Provincetown evokes Norman Mailer in his style, Eugene O'Neill in his legacy, and the legendary Harry Kemp in his enduring presence. "Viva" was first self-published in a limited edition of five hundred copies in 1986 in A Baker's Dozen Plus: New and Selected Poems and Prose by Edward Bonetti. We are grateful to Lynne Burns, Mary Ann Larkin, and Doris Kearns Goodwin, Bonetti's literary executor, for permission to publish.

See form on page 168 to order.

Hilary Masters

IN ROOMS OF MEMORY

By Dennis Minsky



Hilary Masters, 2005

PHOTO BY LYNN BERARD

ON AUGUST 23, 2016, there was a memorial service for Hilary Masters at the Beachcombers Club in Provincetown. In the rustic interior of that old harborside shed, a gathering of his fellow Beachcombers was augmented by family, friends, and townspeople who had known Hilary over the decades. It was a beautiful day, and there were remembrances shared by many, including editor Chris Busa. All through the day, I kept reflecting back to the early years of our friendship, when Hilary and his first wife, Polly (and sometimes their young children, whose middle-aged selves returned to honor him this day), would often dine at *Ciro & Sal's*, where my wife and I worked.

Hilary Masters was the author of seventeen books, including novels, collections of short stories, a memoir, and volumes of essays. He had a long and varied history of visiting Provincetown. He wrote of washing dishes at a restaurant during the summer of 1950, supplementing his income by picking blueberries in the dunes and selling homemade pies to the tourists, sipping beers at the Old Colony, and writing theater reviews for the *Provincetown Advocate*. He regularly returned years later with his first wife and his three children, and in more recent years with the writer Kathleen George, whom he married in 1994.

I do not intend to dwell on Masters's writing (my wife, Deborah, and I each reviewed his works in the 2010 issue of *Provincetown Arts*) as much as on the man himself, but in a discussion about any writer, and certainly one whose subject matter was so often his own life, this is a difficult task. As Yeats asked: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" To spend time with Masters, either in person or on the page, was to be in the presence of a gentleman. He had the pleasant good manners characteristic of an earlier generation. Indeed, he was solidly grounded in the past, as aptly described in his memoir *Last Stands: Notes from Memory* (Godine, 1982). He was virtually brought up by his grandparents in Kansas City; his Irish-immigrant

grandfather had been a horseback calvaryman on the Western frontier in the 1880s, subduing Native Americans, rustlers, and desperados, and had stories galore. And, of course, Hilary's father was the lawyer-turned-acclaimed-poet Edgar Lee Masters (*Spoon River Anthology*, 1915), whose law partner had been Clarence Darrow back in 1903. Edgar Lee Masters was sixty when Hilary was born, and often resided at the somewhat down-at-the-heels Hotel Chelsea in Manhattan, where Hilary visited and played at Dreiser's feet. Hilary Masters was bathed in the past.

The result of this upbringing was a genteel, soft-spoken man, with a gentle smile in a handsome face, and an appreciation for the finer things in life. And Masters was a writer with the same sublimated qualities: refined, intelligent, modulated, never vulgar in an increasingly vulgar age. His fiction is startlingly well crafted and beautifully wrought, but the intersection of his life and his work is most obviously apparent in his essays. Masters, actually, was the one who introduced me to the work of Montaigne, known, of course, as the father of the modern essay form. Masters was devoted to the Frenchman's work and influenced by it. Hilary was the son of Edgar Lee, yes, but also the heir of Michel de Montaigne.

The essay can be a marvelous thing: the messy inchoate details of life sculpted into

a coherent and graceful vessel that delivers a satisfyingly contained *something* that the reader takes away—not a lesson, necessarily, not a parable, something larger, something more universal coming from the particulars—and all done without being constrained or artificial. In essence, art. His memoir *In Rooms of Memory* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009) contains some of the most memorable, and personally revealing, of Masters's essays, including "Disorderly Conduct," "My Father's Image," "A Day in Burgundy," and "Proud Flesh."

My favorite essay, one that I keep going back to, is "Disorderly Conduct." In it, Masters recounts the details of being arrested in Worcester, Massachusetts, on a snowy night in 1978: a visiting professor at Clark University, he is detained for no good reason, brusquely treated, and jailed (strangely relevant in light of recent events in this country). Aside from the details of the event and its aftermath, we get portraits of all the principals in the drama, from his arresting officer to his counsel; digressions into the history of the city, its architecture and institutions; descriptions of other notables who visited there, including Freud and Jung; an account of famous writers who have been jailed, from Dostoyevsky to Mailer; and more. But the heart of the essay has to do with the charges to which he *does* plead guilty:

I have deserted my children, not physically so much as spiritually and emotionally. . . . I have lied to my wife. I have cheated on her. . . . I have admitted my crimes, pled guilty to desertion and adultery, arrogance and selfishness—hubris in the first degree.

If that were all of it, Masters would not be wide off the mark of many writers and artists (or people in general); but there is more—he painfully extracts the contextual basis for his situation, not in the way of an excuse, but as a means of *understanding*.

“Do the abandoned grow up to abandon?” he asks. In this essay and others, Hilary Masters unearths the abandonment that remained a central feature of his young life, and unconsciously informed the working of his adult life. His early upbringing was anything but normal. His mother (“an ex-flapper”) deposited him in his first year with his grandparents in Kansas City and high-tailed it for New York to live with his famous father, a situation that persisted until he was fourteen, when the dynamic of his grandparents’ lives imploded. “Come get your kid,” his grandfather wrote to his mother, and Hilary was hauled off to a New Hampshire boarding school. Before that event, his mother would occasionally come home to visit, and young Hilary came east every summer, also as a visitor. He remembers in “My Father’s Image” appearing at either point of his existence “almost like an extra for a scene.”

His father, while affectionate, could not accommodate his presence and continue to do his work, at a time when he felt time was running out; he was forty-seven when *Spoon River Anthology* was published, and his later work was of mixed merit, his health was failing, and his finances were in free fall. Hilary the young boy, the teenager, the college man come of age, could not have had a less nurturing, more confusing upbringing. What he reveals obliquely is that *he* was the caregiver to the elders in his life.

In this essay about his father, Hilary Masters finds common cause in poet Stanley Kunitz’s “search for the father” (Kunitz’s father committed suicide before he was born):

My children are now distant from me geographically, as they say I was to them even as I passed through the rooms of their childhood. . . . Surely they were as stung by my absence as my father’s perplexed me. . . . The taste for a father denied makes for an appetite never fully satisfied in others, in work or ambition.

This short piece is not the place for a psychological profile of a writer, nor am I the one to do it. But Masters, in his memoir and in some of these essays, provides the basic template, as in this passage from “Disorderly Conduct”:

I have been trying to revive my grandparents and my father so that they might explain

themselves to me, justify their movements across that old landscape where I had been abandoned. And . . . I was seeking a reunion with my mother—at least on paper—piecing together an understanding of her careless love.

Masters also writes in “Disorderly Conduct” that “honesty about the past, to paraphrase St. Augustine, may be about all we can hope to achieve in the present. . . .” and he does so with a remarkable, painfully clear gaze. But his work is certainly not all gloom and doom and introspection. In fact, in “A Day in Burgundy” he states that

. . . this unusual arrangement did put me on the road . . . that particular weaning in Kansas City has probably given me a tramp’s thirst for the unencumbered trek. . . . I put myself in transit. . . .

Consequently, Masters is a great travel writer, with an eye for detail and a sense of context. He is especially good on the delights of food and wine; he comes across as someone who knows the good places to go, wherever he might be, the right repast for every occasion, the right wine for every meal:

June weather in France, the dense aroma of ripening fields as their green and yellow carpets of trefoil and wheat unfold in the sunlight to be caressed by the shadows of close-flying cumulus clouds . . . The wine has darkened from ruby to garnet, deepening its flowing accompaniment to the meal. . . .

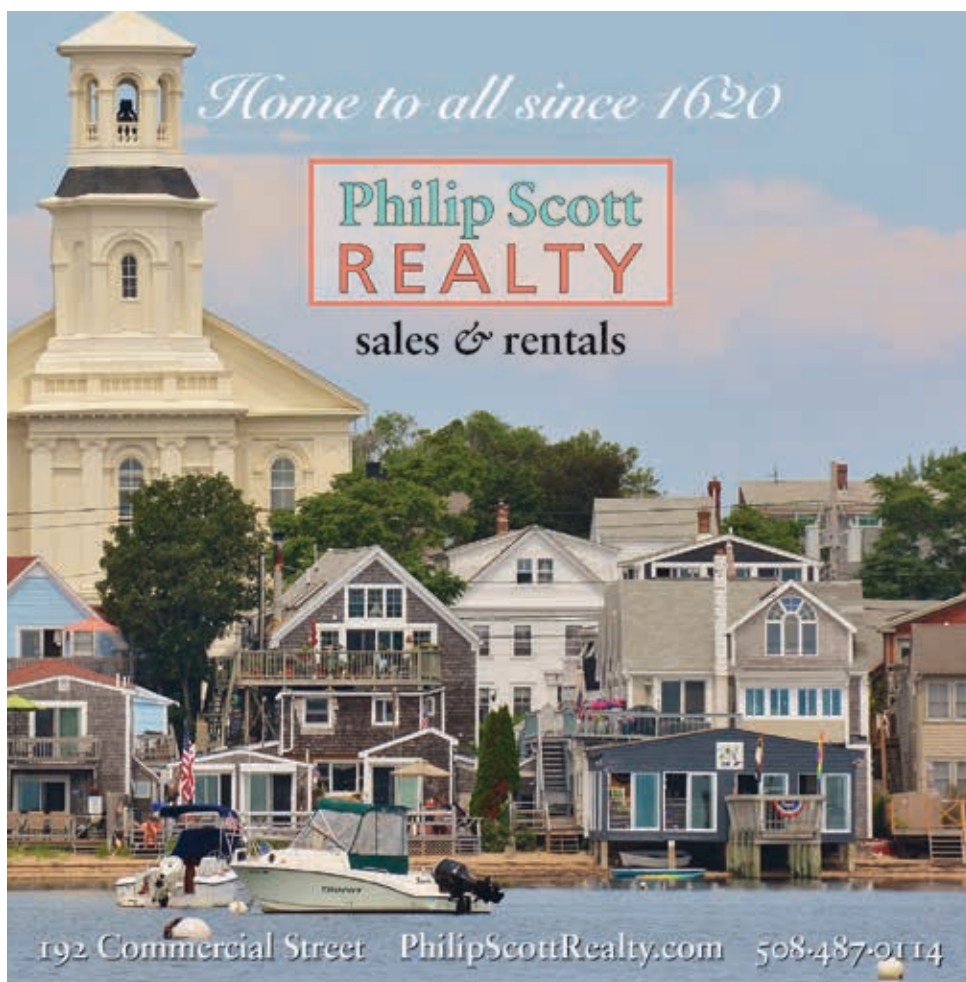
In “Proud Flesh,” Masters discusses the inward examination necessary in the craft of writing:

Those of us who endeavor to trace a small segment of our place and time into words and then limn these onto paper are conscious sometimes of our audacity, our hubris. It is a little thing we do and it may seem to grow in importance in the solitude of our keep.

Hilary, you are too modest: the body of your work, with its elegance and easeful language, its intelligent construction, its grappling with the conundrum of the individual—especially the artist, in the context of family, over generations—its delight in the finer things of life, enlarges all your readers’ lives.

You are good company. ▀

DENNIS MINSKY has been a resident of Provincetown since 1968, when he began working at Ciro & Sal’s restaurant, and has been a year-round resident since 2005. He has worked for the Cape Cod National Seashore, the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, the Dolphin Fleet Whale Watch, and Art’s Dune Tours. He is the chair of the Provincetown Conservation Commission and the Open Space Committee. He tries to write.



FOREWORD BY MARTHA RHODES

AS A BOOK EDITOR, I have the luxury of seeing manuscripts unfold over time—that is, in draft form (version to version) and / or, of course, as I read a given book, poem to poem. As a poet, I tend to let my own poems and collections steep over several years before releasing them into the world. Editing a section for a magazine affords no such luxury of time. The publisher needs poems for a deadline, the ordering of poems has to be settled quickly. This is both difficult for me, because it rubs up against me temperamentally, and exciting because it rubs up against me temperamentally. I am forced to take a different kind of risk than I often do—to invite poets whose work I have admired for years from both short and long distances to send me poems of theirs, choose from the lot, and assemble a group that will please the contributors, the publisher and magazine editor, the reading community, and me. This selection will do just that, I believe, as it highlights the inner and outer landscapes of the poems' speakers, straddling the subjective and objective worlds they inhabit through the intensely inward-gazing and unadorned lyrics of Adamshick and Murphy, through the constraint of form of Sealey, through persona (Burt), and through the outward outcry of Braverman's prayer. The poems, all of them, stick. They don't float up and away out of reach, though you will find buoyancy here. Precision of telling, management of diction, syntax, lineation, typography, and other elements of craft are what draw me to them. And so, a few months since selecting them—not a year, not two years, certainly not three—they feel just right, together between colorful and informative pages, assembled as they are.



Carl Adamshick

BLACK SNOW

I want to tell you
how lonely it is
without her

mostly because
no one asks

My tongue a bank
of fog in the birches

I don't know
what it's like to live here

If this is the world
why don't I know

where my body ends

Nicole Sealey

**CENTO FOR THE NIGHT I SAID,
"I LOVE YOU"**

To the end of the spine, which he can cause to shiver like a root in the rain,
seeking, I think, a light that waits,

he went before anybody came.

And his watch showed years. Not hours
as suspected. I am cold now and I cannot
begin to numb the senses indiscriminately.

Some say we're lucky to be alive, to have
a good portion of the morning.

It isn't ordinary. The way the world unravels,
from a distance, can look like pain
eager as penned in horses.

*(Sources: Anne Carson, Louise Bogan, Chris Abani, Tomas Tranströmer,
Brenda Shaughnessy, Evie Shockley, Sharan Strange, Cornelius Eady,
Marianne Boruch, Andrea Cohen, and Linda Susan Jackson.)*

Kelle Groom

INCURABLE

An open door is an invitation
 Spirit if you don't have land what are you
 What was my cove
 before the door of my throat
 I kept breaking irreplaceable things
 One night, the front door—hinges rusted
 by salt and age—detached, opened into my arms like the lid
 of a coffin, or
 a body I could barely hold, had to lay down on the deck.

*Gabrielle Calvocoressi*THE GOOD GUY'S GOT
NO CHANCE, IT'S SAD

In the face of the azalea breaking open
 or in the case of the face being broken
 open. He's got no chance. None at all.

Take your average person at the start
 of spring. Winter's gone on forever.
 Dear God you're sick of every patch of ice:

I fell at the top of the hill and punched
 the ground until my knuckles bled
 right through my gloves. Who cares

what kind of child I looked like?
 The economy of winter'd worn me down.
 I couldn't stand a single moment more,

not one. I'd tried. Optimistic as a dachshund
 I made my way to work, the clouds
 like mashed potatoes on a plate!

I didn't let the market get me down.
 Let it dip. Let it crash into the gullies (so I said).
 In the face of empty bank accounts

I bought the world a sandwich.
 The last apple in the larder. Fool.
 What did the fox whisper

when I walked into the darkness?
They'll eat your heart for breakfast.
 Did I think it was a dream?

Javier Zamora

ALTERNATE ENDING

for Monseñor Romero

Bless leaves crawling back on trees, ashes
 washed from sidewalks, the collecting of names

at the "appeared" parade. No more war:
 woodpeckers probe deadwood, students

shout their own names—the roses of roses
 growing in mouths. Bless the drought of bullets,

cured cholera, and the comfort of earthquakes.
 No more marriages between safety-pins

and craters. Bless all things we didn't know
 we loved: exiles, silent-skies, tin rooftops,

radios broadcasting the surrendered M-16s
 propped next to rusting artillery. Bless us

who've never dreamed of Gringoland, never
 met a gangster—13 and 18 are only numbers

to count sweetsops at the market—and guavas
 don't remind us of grenades. So suppose

shrapnel is just one seed, some kind of pearl
 swallowed by the archbishop.

John Murillo

ON MAGICAL REALISM

— Ontario, California 1981

Stained with rosaries
and skeletons, some
virgin or another praying
on his shoulder, Tiny
shuffles toward and
leans heavy, as if trying,
into the first perfect hook
my father will land that summer,
and miles north, Tiny's mother
clutches her chest, hearing
just then, on a dusty mantle
in an empty room, framed
glass crack and crack again
just along the left jawline
of a favorite baby boy
who will grow into a man
who calls a man *Nigger*,
in a room full of niggers,
and the nigger with the hook—
my father—asks *What's my name*,
What's my name, What's
my motherfucking name?
as the photo frame
shatters damn near to dust,
Tiny's mother buckles
and she cries, *God . . .*

Donna Masini

SUBWAY CATECHISM

Are you depressed?
Do you have a disability?
Need a divorce?
Are you haunted?
Do not lean on ample time,
others will think you are a target.
Flying through history? Everyone wants to
hog poles, find New Lots. Everyone
wants an emergency exit. Are you at risk?
Dog tired? Pregnant? Everyone wants to look
their best, step out, stand out, be held
by the dispatcher. If you see something, say
a clipping, the past, an alarm will sound
like a true story but we think
the soul is primping, seamless, any way
you swipe it. Just like regular people
in Wakefield. See someone at risk? Remember
you can cook when you're dead. It's a temporary
ferry, a film festival, an express to Gravesend, so always
watch the devices, keep personal gaps
personal. Do not do not do *not* hold on.
Others will litter, ride to jail.
Everyone gets to leave it.

Martha Webster

In a room without tears,

we shared a bed of splendor
in a fire-lit corner of a deep woods home.
You were regal, bearded,
flushed with satisfaction
at the sight of me—your queen.
The evening forest scratched
against the windows:
leaded-glass from floor
to a draping canopy,
held up by carved oak bedposts
entwined with fruiting vines.
No fights, no need for nightfall
curtains as it would always be
just us in our hidden, ember-
heated realm—nude,
sixty-ish, in the dream
only, loving all these years.

D. Nurkse

REDEMPTION

1

I bought the child an aquarium so she would stay with me
in the long twilight and not petition the Other Parent.
But the pink-green Coral Alohas with their etiolated fins
and snap-button eyes ate each other, leaving a small giant
who cruised the extreme rims of the glass, bumping against it.
The water clouded: rarely could you glimpse Bluebeard's
Castle, the tiny mermaid, a chain of bubbles.

We spent those evenings watching a blue light flicker high in
the opposite window—Bosnia, such radiant killings, so much
commentary, the silence of the air shaft.

I bought the child a chameleon. It turned the colors of my
thumb, her fingernail, the charms of her bracelet, all the grays
of the cage. Each night I fed it a live cricket I bought from an
old man in a paper bag hat in a storefront in Naptown. He had
a drawer full of insects and a wooden scoop.

How coldly they sang! I chose whichever was most silent.

2

Night after night, grinding brakes of ambulances—
Maimonides, Methodist, Saint Vincent—and the child sobbing
in a dream. I wake her as gently as I know, whispering her
name urgently until it is an obstacle to her. Her eyes open, she
wonders, why? It was a tolerable dream—why this room littered
with spoons that bear whorled thumbprints, and books open
to marked pages?

3

Tomorrow I buy the dog and everything changes. Tomorrow
the gifts: a rubber bone, too hard to gnaw through, a weighted
bowl, a quoit, a leash, a brass-studded harness, a braided collar.
A critical name to bestow, not too comic, not too lordly.

Tomorrow we train him, crossing nights off the calendar, until
he leads us of his own accord, out of Egypt, into the park and
the soaring shadow of the swing.

UNTITLED 6

I can hear but not
Locate the dripping in the walls.
February has found me.
The house is falling apart, or simply,
I am collapsing in its walls.

You choose the rooms to hold your heart.
The blood still circulates.
I try to use “today” as a verb:
“I am today with sadness.”

Or going out:
A streetlight switches on,
A second sun,
The same color as the sun
Closing the horizon.

And it was summer everywhere
And all at once.



Stephen Burt

HERRING GULL

I always look hungry. I always look the same.
To tell me apart from my brothers you might have to trace
the sunset-orange spot on my beak as I stay in one place,
or tag my heel or say my given name.

In a position of confident wariness
easy to take, or mistake, for weariness,
my head flicks back and forth like a swivel chair
in need of lubrication or minor repair.

I would be graceful, somewhere.
I want to persuade myself that I don't care.
I disdain to compete with your kites, which can go far higher,
but cannot change direction on their own.
Nor can they stay—I have seen them flee, or expire—
if their companions leave them alone.

The froth of the whitening surf can match the tint of my oversize breast,
my overbalanced, exploratory tail.

Though I can appear
as shaky and awkward as the reversed
banner unfolding behind a propeller plane,

my confidence is real.
Beyond that I can't say just how I feel.
To catch me at rest,
you must wait all the hours of my working day and then add one.
No human being has seen my nest.
That doesn't mean I never have, or had, one.

Paul Lisicky

TONY'S HOUSE

You can hold on to anything for too long: a boat, a set of tires, a ripe tomato, a bottle of seltzer. You could also say that about Tony's house, and how he lived in it—coupons on the floor, animals running back and forth through the attic—but you'd be missing that he'd actually graduated from hospice, and six weeks after his second heart attack pushed a shopping cart around the supermarket, eyeing bananas.

Maybe you were afraid of that about us—that *holding on*—when you must have believed the bravest thing to do in the face of death was to shed your skin like a king snake: three lives, four. To this day I'm trying to understand. But when I sit down with the sixteen years of pictures we took of each other, I'm still stopped by the cherishing in our faces, all the way up to the final shot.

Why don't I let this go?

Elizabeth T. Gray, Jr.

NEAR WOLF COPSE 28 OCTOBER 1917

British Trench Map Sheet: 28 NE 1 Zonnebeke D.4.c.10.8

At some point you could see through the broken ground and it became an interior filled with the limitless, a terrible smell, and surprise.

Instructions scatter and were of little use but the unsystematic often brought back a quiver of intelligence at first light while through the periscope nothing, imminent but slowly.

Near where we used to sit playing cards with tedious and panic most of the men are smoking. I cannot remember what she told me to do when I see this.

In "Near Wolf Copse" the geographical coordinates below the title refer to the cartographic grid system developed by the British Royal Survey Corps in 1914 and 1915 and used throughout World War I. Some of the lines are built from phrases from Sarah Harding's translation of a thirteenth-century Tibetan text, Machik's Complete Explanation: Clarifying the Meaning of Chöd (Snow Lion, 2003).

Melanie Braverman

SPOLETO

Oh god of little sorrows, do not wait for me at the gate. Here, even in the fugitive hours before dawn when I am most prone to greet you, for

tonight, at least, do not wait. The one I love is sleeping quietly, and the frenzied bats have flown again to hang upside down in the dark. The light from

outside is casting a bluish sheen on the street. God of little sorrows, I cannot wait any more for joy, will not keep it waiting like a good

child patient for its meager turn. Now you must wait. When I am able to sleep again, you sleep, too. How can you not be tired? How can you not want to rest?


Daniel Tobin

THE MAN FROM NANTUCKET: AN AFTERWORD

On re-reading Augustine's *Confessions*

And after he'd finished
with all of the auto-
erotic fandangos
he again found himself
bereft inside his skin
that felt vaguely like
an attending membrane
to which the signal comes
and goes while, in the mean-
while, the body attunes
for the next indulgence.
Listen: inside the ear,
how what lives beyond this
solitary wanting thrives.

MARTHA RHODES is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *The Beds*. She is on the faculties of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and at Sarah Lawrence College. She also teaches at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. She is the director of Four Way Books, a literary publisher in NYC.



CARL ADAMSHICK's first book, *Curses and Wishes*, won the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets. His second collection, *Saint Friend*, is published with McSweeney's. He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he is an editor at Tavern Books, a nonprofit publisher dedicated to books and book culture.

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STEPHEN (STEPHANIE) BURT is Professor of English at Harvard and the author of several books of poetry and literary criticism, including *Belmont* (2013); *The Art of the Sonnet*, with David Mikics (2010); and *The Forms of Youth* (2007).

GABRIELLE CALVOCORESSI is a poet and essayist whose most recent book, *Apocalyptic Swing*, was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Her poems have been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Boston Review*; on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*; and in numerous journals. She sits on the poetry boards of the *Rumpus* and *From the Fishhouse*. She is the Senior Poetry Editor for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

ELIZABETH T. GRAY, JR., is a poet, a translator of classical and contemporary Persian, and a corporate consultant. Her collection of poems, *SERIES | INDIA*, was published by Four Way Books in 2015. Other work has appeared in *Little Star*, *Talisman*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry International*, the *Kenyon Review Online*, and elsewhere. She has a BA and JD from Harvard University and an MFA from Warren Wilson College.

KELLE GROOM is the author of a memoir, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster), and three poetry collections, most recently *Five Kingdoms* (Anhinga Press). Her work has appeared in *AGNI*, *Best American Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Times*. Her awards include a 2014 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship. She is on the faculty of the low-residency MFA Program at Sierra Nevada College, Lake Tahoe, and is Director of the Summer Program Workshops at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

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JOHN MURILLO is the author of the poetry collection *Up Jump the Boogie*, finalist for both the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the PEN Open Book Award. His honors include a Pushcart Prize and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Cave Canem Foundation, and the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. He teaches at Hampshire College and New York University.

RYAN MURPHY is the author of *The Redcoats* and *Down with the Ship*. He has received grants and awards from the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, *Chelsea Magazine*, the Fund for Poetry, and the New York Foundation for the Arts.

D. NURKSE is the author of ten poetry collections, most recently *A Night in Brooklyn*, which will be reissued in paperback by Knopf in 2016. His work has been shortlisted for the Forward Prize for best poetry book published in the UK, and he's the recipient of a Literature Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

NICOLE SEALEY is the author of *The Animal After Whom Other Animals Are Named*, winner of the 2015 Drinking Gourd Chapbook Poetry Prize, forthcoming from Northwestern University Press. She is the Programs Director of Cave Canem Foundation.

DANIEL TOBIN is the author of seven books of poems, most recently *Belated Heavens* (winner of the Massachusetts Book Award, 2011), *The Net* (2014), and *From Nothing* (2016), all from Four Way Books. His many awards include fellowships from the NEA and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

MARTHA WEBSTER has recently published poems in *Prairie Schooner*, the *Collagist*, and the *Cortland Review*. She lives in Amityville, New York.

JAVIER ZAMORA was born in La Herradura, El Salvador; he migrated to the US when he was nine. He holds fellowships from CantoMundo, Colgate University, the MacDowell Colony, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Yaddo. His poems appear or are forthcoming in *Narrative*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, the *Kenyon Review*, the *American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere.

JAMES JONES FIRST NOVEL FELLOWSHIP

Josie Sigler



PHOTO BY TABITHA MORGAN

THE FLYING SAMPIETRINI's main character, Celestino, is a member of the corps of workers whose ancestors built Saint Peter's Basilica. Over four centuries, the sampietrini, who passed their jobs down to their sons, were responsible for caring for works of art such as Bernini's Baldacchino and Michelangelo's Pietà, as well as cleaning and repairing the basilica itself, which they still do today, swinging from ropes hundreds of feet in the air. The novel's chapters alternate between the stories of the other sampietrini in Celestino's line and his own story, which begins in 1939 with the death of Pope Pius XI, the focus of this excerpt. When Pius XII orders the crypt to be renovated, assigning the sampietrini to do the bulk of the labor, the second-century necropolis, where the bones of Saint Peter were rumored to be buried, is discovered.

So Celestino, who is a single father, cares for his son by day, and digs by night, as World War II devastates Europe. After the Armistice, when the Germans occupy Rome, Celestino is desperate to protect his own son from the violence in the city. When Angelo, Celestino's half brother and a member of the antifascist resistance, encounters an abandoned Jewish boy in a chimney

after the razzia, the roundup of Rome's Jews, he brings the boy to Celestino, who must decide whether or not to risk the safety of his own son to save the boy.

I have largely written fiction about growing up working class in Detroit, so this novel represents new territory for me. My grandfather was Italian and I was raised Catholic, but I had never heard of the sampietrini before a few years ago. I was living on the Oregon coast; every afternoon I would run up Cascade Head, a nearby peak, while listening to an audiobook. One was about the building of Saint Peter's Basilica, and, seven hours in, there was a single mention of the sampietrini and their work. I nearly lost my footing as a story about a sampietrino estranged from his son—quite a problem in a hereditary career—and struggling with the changes of the twentieth century unfolded before me. By the time I got to my desk, I knew the son's story, too, and the others followed. The primary plot emerged because of my ongoing interest in the debate regarding the Church's culpability in the Holocaust, much of which revolves around the policies of Pius XII. I felt compelled to consider what choices someone with far less power might make in such circumstances.

The Flying Sampietrini

WAKING ON THAT still-dark February morning in 1939, I reached for her warmth but my fingertips found the cold stone wall beside the bed. So I remembered: my Amaranta was gone. It had not been a nightmare. I rose and walked to Pietro's small cot to make sure my son was not just a dream. I bent to kiss his warm brow and his eyes opened like coals in a fast draft.

You're going in so early, Papà? Pietro said.

La Barca never stops sailing, I said.

This is what we sampietrini call our Basilica: the Boat. She looks stationary because she's enormous, but in truth she drifts on the

swamp that is Rome, pulling herself slowly apart. To us, she is more shipwreck than building.

I settled Pietro back into sleep, pulled on my pants, and went into the kitchen, where my mother gave me bread just from the oven. I slipped into the *vicolo* behind the building, got on my bike, and rode along the Tiber toward San Pietro. It was just after four. Although I could not see them, I knew every oddly placed cobble on my route and the dome, lit up golden against the black sky, was an easy target, could be seen from anywhere in the city. My bread steamed when I bit into it. A light rain dampened my cheeks and shoulders. The river, churning and umber during the day, was a flat expanse of slate at that hour.

I stashed my bike behind the German College and strolled through the colonnades. A slight shift in the quality of the rain made me look at the sky. We have our own climate in Vatican City. They say it's because the fountains add moisture, the bulk of the Basilica confuses the mists, and the Leonine Wall traps heat. But even before Caligula built his racetrack here, the Ager Vaticanus was a marsh filled with venomous snakes and upset gods. Those who could hear the voices and weren't afraid of the snakes, it's said, listened and became oracles.

In other words, oracles are people who have cojones and are in the right place at the right time.

Over il Papa's rooms, a dark cloud of smoke hovered, shimmering in the gas lights atop the dome. His windows were bright. Papa Pio had always been an early riser. But twice that November his heart had threatened to explode, and since then he had often remained in bed until well after sunrise. The night had been cold. Perhaps Father Faustino, il Papa's nurse, was making a fire to warm the sleeping Pio. Or perhaps il Papa was already working—word had it that he had skipped meals to write his address for the celebration, poring over his pages. I watched as the cloud of smoke drifted toward the smaller dome over the Gregorian chapel. Its spire separated the billow. Each cloud sealed into itself and floated off alone. Like my Amaranta and me.

In those days, there was nothing that did not remind me of her. She was everywhere, but remote, like a girl I'd never met but had long loved from afar. Riding her bicycle ahead of me on summer days, her dress floating in the wind. Sitting one table over in the *gelateria* eating a small bowl of pistachio, smiling at Pietro, admiring him as women did. Pietro had Amaranta's

lovely wide hazel eyes, mio nonno's thick curls, mia nonna Azzurra's high chiseled cheekbones.

Vittorio, the young sampietrino I was training, stumbled into the piazza.

You're late, I said, though it was only by moments.

I'm sorry, he said.

He followed me to the service room behind the sacristy. We collected our tools from the storage closet and went down the stairs beneath Saint Andrew into the Grotte Vecchie. I hunched my shoulders; the ceiling was only two meters high in the crypt. We opened the passageway in the northeast pier and climbed the spiral staircase within. When we reached the top, we stepped out onto the ledge of the drum Michelangelo built—both the one you're thinking of and our *antenato*, our forebear, Michelangelo, who made my family lucky when he was chosen to be a sampietrino. Odd rays came in the windows from the outside lights and I knelt in a patch, keeping one shoulder to the wall. I showed Vittorio again how to make the mix: sand, cement, lime, can of water.

I affixed my rope to an iron ring in the wall above me and yanked it tight. I tucked the rope between my legs. Then I cast myself from the ledge and soared. When you fly, my grandfather once told me, your soul follows just behind, feels like the wind when it enters again. Glad for any escape, I kept my body ahead as long as I could, letting the rope slide through my hands until its slack snapped away and *il cavallo*, the small wooden board tied to its end, caught my weight.

I landed a third of the way down the span-drel, on the quill in Saint Mark's hand. I flipped my headlamp on and a pool of light fell on the mosaic, illuminating the lapis tesserae of night sky, the gilded stars. A night so unlike the one we had just lived through. Motes of dust and

fine shreds from the rope darted and chased as my eyes adjusted. I ran my hand over the split in the sky and a few tesserae loosened. I put them in my pocket. But I was still above the worst of the damage.

I tipped my head back and looked up at Vittorio. My beam landed on his bored face, then lost itself in the dome behind him. I tugged the rope, signaling him to lower me. We were alone, so I could have simply spoken to him, but this was an important part of his training: *You are invisible. You are silent.* Someday I would teach Pietro the ways of the sampietrini as my grandfather had taught me. Another man's son was good practice.

Vittorio let the rope from the brace too fast, missed it with his other hand, and I slipped, lurching downward. I was falling. I clutched my *ciondolo*, the source of my luck, which I wore on a string around my neck, as I do now. It is a bit of Amaranta's hair I gathered from the hog yard where her father had cut it. If I fell, I could join her, but what about my Pietruccio?

I felt a sharp jerk at the base of my spine as Vittorio caught the rope at last.

Panting, I dropped my *ciondolo*, placed both hands on the wall, and looked into the mouth of the lion under the saint's book. I'd fallen three meters. But in that moment, it amazed me that in my lifetime no sampietrino had broken his neck on the marble floor four hundred feet below.

Sorry, Vittorio called out.

I did not answer. I was too busy making plans to smack him on the side of the head when we were face-to-face again. I signaled that he should lower the bucket. *Piano, piano*—slowly. I took up some rope and leaned forward to examine the lower part of the crack. It was deeper than expected and met at its nadir an area

that showed signs of previous repair. The job would require extra stapling. Morning masses would start soon. We'd have time to seal it. But it would not dry fast in such weather. I hoped Lorenzo would be able to replace the tiles before the celebration. It would be no good to mark ten years of sovereignty for il Papa in a basilica that showed its wear. I went to work hammering and applying plaster. Soon the crack was filled. My empty bucket swung on its handle, creaking in harmony with the first groans of an organ beneath me. In my lifetime, I have patched la Barca a thousand times. But this crack I remember well because of what happened next.

The organ stopped. Someone was weeping. I looked down. A young priest knelt before the altar, his cassock bright as blood. His body shook.

I signaled Vittorio to haul me up. We rushed to the sacristy where we sampietrini meet each morning to discuss the day's assignments. The others were assembling. Manzoni stood before his locker still wearing his street clothes, his coat damp with rain. When he turned, his hat was crushed in his hand. Tears streamed down his face.

Il Papa is dead, Manzoni said.

Vittorio, who stood next to me, brayed like a donkey. I clapped him on the back. Maurizio turned as grey as the day, clutched his folded hands together in front of his paunch, and began praying. I had known something was wrong when I had seen the smoke over il Papa's rooms hours before. I felt it was too late to pray and I did not cry. I had no tears for anyone but my Amaranta.

Manzoni pulled himself together, removed his coat, and wiped his face on his sleeve.

Others have the luxury of mourning, he said. We have a funeral to prepare.

Manzoni produced the book and began to scratch out a new plan for the day, drawing arrows in the margins of what was already there and barking out orders.

Celestino, Raffaele, Ricardo, Giovanni. You'll do the chapel, Manzoni said.

So the four of us walked with bowed heads to the Sistine Chapel and began to construct the scaffolding for il Papa's wake. While we solemnly pounded nails and tested the structure, Doctor Petacci prepared il Papa's body, as il Papa's regular doctor was himself bedridden that week. Just after noon, several priests and other important men came through the door bearing on their shoulders the platform upon which il Papa's body lay. We sampietrini attached our ropes to the platform and hoisted it, settling it onto the scaffolding so il Papa lay just beneath the ceiling, as Michelangelo had while painting the hand of God reaching out to touch the hand of Adam.

Upon seeing that il Papa's robes had become twisted in his ascent, Monsignor Confalonieri asked me to climb the scaffolding to rearrange them. I braced my knees against the wooden beams and tugged gently at the scarlet—so rich to the touch—of his garments until they were as smooth and even as a statue's. He was the first

dead person I'd seen since they left me alone with my Amaranta in that stark hospital room for a few moments so I might collect myself. I never imagined I'd be so close to il Papa, dead or alive, that I'd see his cracked yellow skin, the puss seeping from the corners of his mouth. In death, we lose our status, grow more alike than different. Poor, mortal bastards—all of us. I looked up at Adam, his beautiful, hopeful, young face turned to the side. From the ground, his hand and God's looked so close, but hovering there under the ceiling I could see they were actually quite far apart.

BY THE TIME I rode home that evening, some in Rome were already whispering of dark happenings. I paused in an alleyway where all the shops were closed to listen to the rare silence broken only by a woman's sobbing floating down from an open window alongside ribbons of rain. Two men rounded the corner. They did not see me parked beneath the folded awning of a fruit vendor's cart. After years of practice, I faded into walls without trying. The men talked in low voices about Doctor Petacci, who was the father of Mussolini's mistress, Claretta.

It would have been easy enough, one said, and I could not tell if I heard horror or admiration in his voice.

You could not tell much in those days about your own countrymen. Everything that was a clue could just as easily mean nothing. For

example, these two were not carrying umbrellas despite the rain. This might mean they were good *fascisti*—that autumn Mussolini had spoken against umbrellas, said they were for pansies and that a people who carried them would never found an empire. But it might also mean that these men wanted only to appear to be good *fascisti*. This might be because they were opposed to fascism, or because they did not care about it at all but did not want to be harassed. In any case, as if God wanted to annoy the *fascisti*, that winter was filled with more sleet than I've seen before or since. And if il Papa was God's presence on earth, perhaps God was poised to go beyond irritation. I had heard that il Papa, in his address to the bishops, would denounce Mussolini, if not for the cruelty of the new laws, at least for the interference—if il Papa said a baptized man was no longer a Jew, he did not need Mussolini to tell him different.

The timing! said the other man as they rounded the opposite corner and disappeared.

Yes, the timing was just right for Mussolini. But some in Rome always whisper of something dark happening. I did not believe there was any conspiracy. At least, no more so than usual. To believe in a conspiracy would mean I was a failed oracle. That I was in the right place but lacked cojones. Now such failure is the defining feature of my life. But as I rode off, rain spraying in wide arcs from my bike's tires, I imagined it: What if I had run into il Papa's rooms that morning just in time to catch Petacci holding up his dripping, poisonous needle? What if I had knocked Petacci

THE JAMES JONES FIRST NOVEL FELLOWSHIP



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to the floor? I would have been arrested, but il Papa would be alive, and perhaps Petacci's plot and my prophetic heroism would have come to light. And if they hadn't—well, Rome is for martyrs, isn't it?

Once Pietro was asleep, I met Angelo in Mamma's *panetteria* for a *caffè* as I did most evenings. Angelo's family lived on the top floor of our building. My family and the *panetteria* occupied the bottom two. No one knew how long this had been the case. But our entanglement went far deeper than rooms stacked on top of each other. We rarely acknowledged it, because that would have forced us to think of how it came to be, but Angelo was my *fratellastro*, my half brother.

I don't know, Angelo said. It's possible even Pio Undecimus didn't hate the Jews enough for Mussolini, who can't do enough to impress Hitler.

That's ridiculous, I said. Il Papa's heart was weak as a rose crushed under a boot heel! I can't imagine—

I cut myself off. Sometimes when I talked to Angelo, I became less certain of what I said even as I spoke, could see he would win the argument no matter what I said. In any case, talking of il Papa's health with an outsider was forbidden. We *sampietrini* are sworn to secrecy about all we learn in the course of our work.

Angelo looked around for my mother, who never liked to hear Angelo and me fight. When Angelo did not see her, he lifted and jiggled his

tazzina at me, nearly spilling his *caffè*, as if I should know better.

I don't quite think murder, Angelo said. But perhaps Petacci did not do all he could for the old Papa, either? Nothing is ever as obvious as plain old murder anymore.

Angelo ran his hands through his hair, which stood out wildly.

Except when it is, he added.

Even before he was sent to Ethiopia, Angelo had questioned *fascismo*. I saw no flame in Angelo for the war. But Amaranta had chosen me. So Angelo went. He stood on a barge floating on the Suez Canal, part of a second wave of soldiers headed to avenge the Christmas Offensive. He saw the burns covering the bodies of women and children after Italy dropped a ton of mustard gas on their village east of Amba Aradam. They called it the rain of death. Angelo said he would never forgive himself. A broken foot had brought him home, where he soon fell in love again. But in October, Milena, Angelo's girl, had been forced out of her job at the *scuola elementare* in San Lorenzo. Her father was relieved from his position at the university. The laws were growing more severe. Every Jew in Rome had been barred from anything but rag collection. Soon Milena came to tell Angelo she would leave for America as soon as her father could afford their passage.

We can't marry, anyway, Milena told Angelo. Just let me go. You'll find someone else.

Angelo told her it didn't matter. That they loved each other so much the rules could not apply to them. He would not even think of another. He would marry her anyway. He would find a way.

That was Angelo. Never for sale. Loyal to the end.

In the *panetteria* that night, Angelo swallowed the last of his *caffè* and walked downstairs and out into the night, still muttering about how things had been bad enough, but every last blessed thing in Rome had gone to hell since Mussolini had gotten into bed with that mustachioed *pazzo*, a man so absolutely crazy he thought he could force the steel of love into another shape!

What was the shape of my love? I wondered. Was my love a cloud of smoke split in two? A river dark as slate?

I went into my room. I checked on Pietro, who was sleeping soundly. I took off my pants, scattering tesserae on the floor, and got into the bed. I was careful to stick to my side so I could pretend that Amaranta was there, that I did not want to wake her.

I heard the door to the cellar creak open.

Not again, I whispered.

But soon the soft moaning came up through the holes that had been cut into our building when the plumbing went in. I flipped onto my stomach and pulled the pillow over my head.

This had started the day Milena told Angelo she planned to leave. If they made a baby, Angelo had told me, they would be allowed to marry—a Catholic could still marry a Jew if in the process

he legitimized her children. They could not meet upstairs because Angelo's family would hear. So the cellar it was.

I recalled without bidding it, as if all jealousies connected like train tracks at some station deep in my soul, how Angelo had come down to our flat on the eve of the Day of Faith. Amaranta was two months pregnant then, not yet showing. She had been fretting about trading her wedding ring in for a band of steel. Gold for the Fatherland. It had been on everyone's lips since the sanctions had begun. My Amaranta was no more a fanatic for *fascismo* than Angelo. But women who didn't give up their rings could expect to have their houses searched, their neighbors turned against them. Even il Papa was in favor of the exchange. I did not want any problems, so I did not stand against it, though my throat ached whenever I looked at that slim band of gold on her finger.

Angelo stood around for a few moments that night making small talk. Then he reached into his pocket and brought out a paper sachet closed with sealing wax. He opened it, his hands shaking, and drew out a band of steel. How he had acquired it I did not know. He slid Amaranta's real ring off and this one on. My Amaranta started to laugh and cry. She hugged Angelo, held him to her until he blushed.

We cannot let you marry Mussolini, now, can we? he said.

He handed her real ring to me and said, Hide it.

We both understood where I was to hide it.

I reached out for the wall as I had that morning. I placed my hand on the brick under which my Amaranta's ring rested along with the treasures Angelo and I had discovered as boys.

I could not listen to their lovemaking anymore. I stood and swore as the scattered tesserae jabbed into the soles of my feet. I went to the stairwell and out into the *vicolo*. The night had cleared and I could see the stars in the sky.

What was the shape of my love?

If mio nonno's love for Nonna was a piece of coal, mio papà's love for Mamma a mountain range covered in snow, and Angelo's love for Milena a ship that returned again and again to the safe port of his own heart, perhaps my love for Amaranta was a galaxy filled with stars. Maybe we could still see each other's light, even if we couldn't feel each other's warmth. ❧

JOSIE SIGLER is the author of a book of short stories, *The Galaxie and Other Rides*, and a book of poems, *Living Must Bury*. Josie has received a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship and an Elizabeth George Foundation Grant. She has attended residencies at the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology, the Millay Colony for the Arts, and the Studios of Key West. Josie also completed a PEN Northwest Margery Davis Boyden Wilderness Residency, which affords a writer the opportunity to live for a year on a remote homestead above Rogue River in southern Oregon's Klamath Mountains. She holds a dual PhD in literature and creative writing from the University of Southern California.



A Wild Swan and Other Tales

By Michael Cunningham
Illustrations by Yuko Shimizu

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015

A BOOK REVIEW BY CHRISTOPHER BUSA

WHAT IMPISHNESS POSSESSED Michael Cunningham to revisit the fairy tales of his youth and twist universally happy endings, so soothing to terrified children, into the darker denouements so much truer of mature experience? Cunningham, the gifted storyteller and author of six celebrated novels—including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Hours*, written in devoted homage to Virginia Woolf, and *Specimen Days*, which supremely channeled Walt Whitman from the nineteenth century into the next two centuries of his legacy—is clearly inspired by classic literature. He has confirmed that he has over ten thousand books in his library, but that must be a mere fraction of all that he has absorbed.

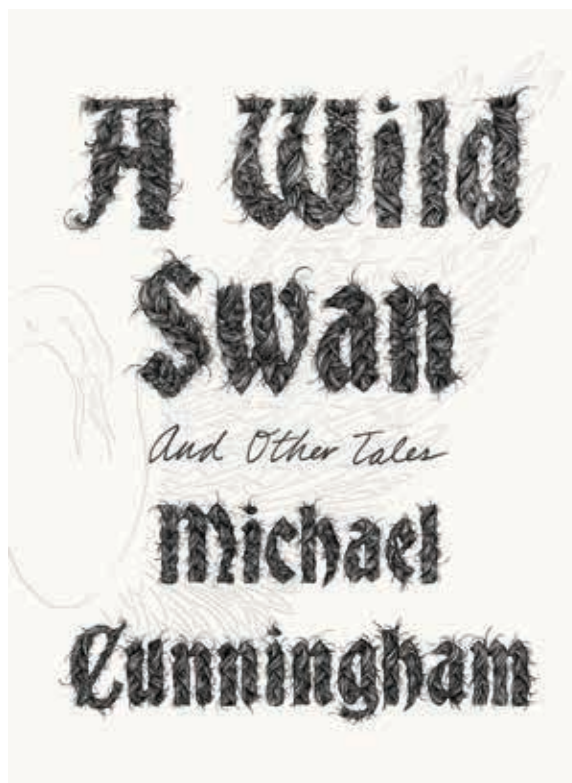
Recently, in an interview following the publication of his latest book, *A Wild Swan and Other Tales*, based on nine classic fairy tales seared into our collective memory—the recorded tales of the Brothers Grimm (“Hansel and Gretel,” “Snow White and Rose Red,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” “Rapunzel”), the invented stories of Hans Christian Andersen (“The Wild Swans,” “The Steadfast Tin Soldier”), and the classic stories “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “A Monkey’s Paw,” and “Beauty and the Beast”—Cunningham revealed his disenchantment with the stories his parents read to him when he was five years old. Frustrated when the story ended, almost always happily, the precocious child demanded, “What happened next?” Back then, he received no answer; now, he supplies belated speculations, jarring and revelatory, in his uncanny revisitations, in which the abbreviated fairy tales become occasions for a developed adult wisdom.

Cunningham has said on many occasions that the limited range of the short story is not his natural inclination. He likens the novel to the *Queen Mary*, an ocean liner that can transport thousands of souls, each burdened with the luggage of a particular life story; a short story, by contrast, is like a dinghy, capable of carrying nothing extraneous. Fairy tales, told to children, devoid of psychological motives, state existential dilemmas abruptly and boldly, simplifying complex plots, creating characters that are merely generic types, in which the king and queen are parents and the prince and princess are their children, and evil is as potent as virtue. Part of the delight of fairy tales, for the child as well as the adult, is not quite knowing why such a simple tale is so delightful. Here the unconscious is free to achieve its enchanting effect.

In the beginning of *A Wild Swan*, “Dis. Enchant.,” as in the end of the book, “Ever/After,” Cunningham offers an adult justification for the belated uses of enchantment. In the first few paragraphs of the book, he begins by observing, archly,

Most of us can be counted on to manage our own undoings. Vengeful entities seek only to devastate the rarest, the ones who have somehow been granted not only bower and trumpet but comeliness that startles the birds in the trees, coupled with grace, generosity, and charm so effortless as to seem like ordinary human qualities.

This ironic sense of humor resonates throughout the stories. I’m reminded of a quote by the fantasy novelist Angela Carter, who observed, “Comedy is tragedy that happens to other people,” and Steve Allen’s quip, “Comedy is tragedy plus



time.” The synthesis of the iconic fairy-tale format, with its often tragic and frightening events, with Cunningham’s keen observations creates storytelling that is as entertaining as it is revelatory.

For example, what happened, really, to the little prince in “The Wild Swans” of folklore, whose right arm was turned into a swan’s wing? Cunningham conjures this character in his opening story, “A Wild Swan,” as he adjusts to modern life:

Finally he packed a few things and went out into the world. The world, however, proved no easier for him than the palace had been. He could get only the most menial of jobs. He had no marketable skills (princes don’t), and just one working hand. Every now and then a woman grew interested, but it always turned out she was briefly drawn to some Leda fantasy or, worse, hoped her love could bring him back his arm. Nothing ever lasted. The wing was awkward on the subway, impossible in cabs. It had to be checked constantly for lice. And unless it was washed daily, feather by feather, it turned from the creamy white of a French tulip to a linty, dispiriting gray.

The prism of adult imagination bends pure experience into its complicated components. The prince ends his days, if not living happily ever after, consoled that his life did not turn out worse:

Some nights, when he’s stumbled home smashed (there are many such nights), negotiated the five flights up to his apartment, turned on the TV, and passed out on the sofa, he awakes,

hours later, as the first light grays the slats of the venetian blinds, with only his hangover for company, to find that he's curled his wing over his chest and belly; or rather (he knows this to be impossible, and yet . . .) that the wing has curled itself, by its own volition, over him, both blanket and companion, his devoted resident alien, every bit as imploring and ardent and inconvenient as that mutt from the pound would have been. His dreadful familiar. His burden, his comrade.

The consequences mount in the adult after-life of simple tales that happened long ago, far away, so absurd in their foreignness and their refusal to consider cause and effect. By definition, fairy tales are not credible, they are devoid of psychology, seldom analyze motives, and are subject to inexplicable, invisible, and magical forces.

We are deep into the second story in Cunningham's collection, "Crazy Old Lady," before we recognize the house made of gingerbread, with windowpanes of translucent sugar, as the abode of the wicked witch in "Hansel and Gretel." Cunningham has conflated the children's cruel stepmother, so starved she would abandon her husband's offspring, with the forest hag who would eat them, after fattening them on candy. Cunningham exposes the revenge of the innocent children—"those young psychopaths"—taking out their anger on their stepmother by burning the witch in the oven meant for them.

"Jacked" is Cunningham's jaded twist on "Jack and the Beanstalk," in which the boy sells his parents' only possession for some "magic beans":

There are any number of boys like Jack. Boys who prefer the crazy promise, the long shot, who insist that they're natural-born winners. They have a great idea for a screenplay—they just need, you know, someone to write it for them.

Cunningham's fourth tale, "Poisoned," focuses on the poisoned apple the evil witch prepares to dispatch the "fairest of them all," Snow White. Cunningham playfully calls the dwarfs "midgets," as if to belittle the characters in a transposed tale about sexual seduction, the poisoned apple being a psychological "displacement" for the risks involved with sexuality. The seducer is told, "They weren't midgets. They were *dwarfs*. I don't know why you refuse to understand the difference." He apologizes, "I'm sorry. I'm displacing my emotions." Only to be chastised, "You got that phrase from your shrink, do you even know what it means?"

In "A Monkey's Paw," a visitor arrives at the door of the White family, a "happy-enough family" who are tempted to want more. The visitor brings the severed paw of a monkey, attesting to its power to grant three wishes. After they wish for two hundred pounds, the amount necessary to pay off the mortgage on the hovel they call a

house, the Whites are then horrified when their son is mauled by a machine at the factory where he works, and the factory sends a man to compensate the family with exactly two hundred pounds. For their second wish, they ask for their son's return, and he crawls home from the graveyard—a mangled creature who lives with them in place of their son, a constant reminder that they still have that third wish.

I read "Little Man," Cunningham's version of "Rumpelstiltskin," when it first appeared in the *New Yorker*, and before I read it in the context of this book. I was amazed by his clever retelling of this tale, in which the daughter of an impoverished milliner has the power to turn straw into gold (or so he tells the king), a story so preposterous that even Cunningham can hardly believe that the daughter quickly develops her miraculous knack. She is assisted by a "little man," less than four feet tall, twisted and stub-footed, "with a chin as long as a turnip." The details conjure belief—even though the spinning does not go well at first, eventually things improve: "You concentrate—belief is crucial. One of the reasons ordinary people are incapable of magic is simple dearth of conviction."

A stellar transformation by Cunningham is "Steadfast; Tin," his version of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," in which the toy soldier, the last to be made from a mold, is missing a leg, since the metal had been exhausted. Cunningham depicts the toy as a real person who lost a leg in an accident. At a fraternity party, the handsome fellow scores a night with a beautiful woman who has just been rejected by a boy she thought she loved. Cunningham writes,

He's drawn to remote girls, unavailable girls, girls who don't fall for it, being, as he is, a boy who might have been carved by Michelangelo; one of those exceptional beings who wear their beauty as if it were a common human state, and not an aberration. A remote and unavailable girl is rare for him.

But this remote girl possesses a readiness that is unexpected. She strips. He follows suit and discloses his deformity, saying, "It's a prosthetic," tossing the fake leg onto the floor. "Car accident," he tells her. So he marries the first girl who treats his amputation as if it were unimportant. Their marriage is haunted by the paper ballerina of the actual fairy tale, who ends up breaking the heart of the one-legged toy soldier, but this is only a small shadow of darkness upon their actual life together. Later in life, they watch the embers of a fire die out, seeing something in the fire:

. . . something small and animate, a tiny sphere of what she can think of only as livingness. . . . She doesn't ask him if he's seen it, too. But by now she and he are sufficiently telepathic that he knows to say, "Yes," without the slightest idea of what he's agreeing to.

It is as if unconscious knowledge, contained in the fairy tale, has the staying power to invade, and inspire, the actual life of adults.

Cunningham's version of "Beauty and the Beast," titled "Beasts," makes real the beastliness of the beast, depriving him of any romantic attraction. He evokes the repulsive by a kind of absence: "Try not to think about the beast's breath," and the "zoo stench—scat mingled with rage—that no cologne could cover." This beast, Cunningham shows, has been "duped" into thinking that a pretty girl, against her will, could love a monster—or, in the end, is Beauty the one who has been duped?

Rapunzel is the subject of Cunningham's last story, "Her Hair," and the long braid that served as a vehicle to escape entrapment in the witch's tower in the original story is no longer a means of escape, but has become instead a means of holding onto the allure of the past, a memory of beauty as potent as reality.

It must be noted that the exquisite illustrations of Yuko Shimizu that adorn the book weave images into the text as deftly as Cunningham's weaving of words. Her drawings resonate with the imagination of classic fairy-tale illustration, but their dark symbolism and strange shapes add emotional complexity and impact.

In the last chapter, "Ever/After," the only fairy tale invented wholly by Cunningham, he offers wisdom and insight not granted the innocent:

There was, in general, peace, though robberies and contract disputes continued; sons and daughters still occasionally ran off, or lost their minds; irritation, long harbored, still festered occasionally into murder.

Nevertheless, overall, there was abundance and grace. . . . Inventors produced mechanisms . . . that captured and held music long thought to exist only as long as the players played and the singers sang. In the forest, the hares and pheasants paused occasionally, with the same surprised interest, at the sound of music, and did not know or care whether the music emanated from living musicians or from musicians long dead.

In much of Cunningham's fiction, there comes a moment, typically years later, when a character recalls a moment of happiness and the recollection prompts a paradoxical revelation: that moment of happiness, long past, offered the hope that the future would provide even greater happiness. In his celebrated novel *The Hours*, Cunningham's Clarissa relives the vital memory of a passionate kiss, at last understanding that "it's perfect because it seemed, at the time, so clearly to promise more." Here, Cunningham isolates the quickness, the aliveness of what D. H. Lawrence called "vital truth," which "contains the memory of all that for which it is not true." Somehow, plenitude and the opposite of plenitude are able to coexist in tranquil recollection or a shift in consciousness.

Our own memories of these iconic stories resonate with such paradox. Why do fairy tales, often fraught with danger, allow children to escape in peaceful slumber? Children know that there may not be such things as giants, but they also know that there are such things as grown-ups, who may seem like giants at times. While Cunningham reinvents these stories with adult humor and understanding, they still inspire with wonder and revelation.

And ultimately, in Cunningham's fairy land, as in the stories of youth, filled with witches and beasts and arbitrary magic, we remain safe: "Some went willingly, some went grudgingly, but all of them, every child, returned home, every night." ❏

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is founder and editorial director of Provincetown Arts Press.

Forbidden City

By Gail Mazur

University of Chicago Press, 2016

A BOOK REVIEW BY PETER CAMPION

THE POETRY OF GRIEF AND WONDER

Forbidden City, Gail Mazur's new collection of poetry, opens with its title poem, relating a dream in which the poet and her deceased beloved have been granted one more year together. As the poem wends its way to its ending, the dream circles back to a memory of China:

... Daylight

flickers through a bamboo grove,
as we approach the Forbidden City,

looking together for the Hall
of Fulfilling Original Wishes.

*Time is the treasure, you tell me,
and the past is its hiding place.*

I instruct our fictional children,
The past is the treasure, time

*is its hiding place. If we told him
how much we love him, how much*

we miss him, he could stay.
But now you've taken me back


to Luoyang, to the Garden of Solitary Joy,
over a thousand years old—

I wake, I hold your hand, you let me go.

This is a lyric of such intensity, such distillation of the poet's address into necessary speech, that as an opener it may raise a question—how will she ever follow *this one*? What makes this book so exceptional is the strength and nuance with which Mazur does rise to that challenge. Rendering grief, these poems also work to renew wonder.



Mazur's aesthetic resourcefulness shows, in fact, in those same lines from "Forbidden City." For one thing, humor tempers and deepens the poignancy of this ending: as soon as the poet hears the oracular words from her deceased beloved, she not only mistranslates them to her fictional children, but does so to "instruct." Throughout the collection, Mazur's irony, often paired with a wholesome dose of self-deprecation, reveals a restless, curious, and sometimes accident-prone intelligence at play. "Inventory," for example, has the poet addressing her lost beloved, this time to tell him about the visit an appraiser has paid to their home. However, every time she mentions the appraiser, she misremembers the woman's name, inventing new names as she goes on. In "Family Crucible," Mazur repurposes Walt Whitman's famous declaration "Look for me under your boot soles!" to refer to the way one grown sister has treated another.



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These comical moments help to alleviate the painfulness of loss; they also show an artistic sensibility in action. Mazur's medium, language, is forever being questioned, culled, objected to, and enjoyed—not only for its felicities, but also for its recalcitrance, its quirkiness: just as dream life unsettles the surface of reality in these poems, so words themselves reveal a dynamic instability.

Forbidden City is a book of wondrous form-finding. These poems are often about art itself, but they have none of the insularity we might associate with “art for art’s sake.” For Mazur, the pursuit of form is not a matter of neglecting emotional, messy content, much less of writing in traditional measures (though Mazur employs rhyme to excellent effect in a poem called “My Studio”). Instead, in all their tonal variety, these poems reveal form as a quality that philosophical concepts and good jokes have in common, a logic of simultaneous surprise and inevitability.

Maybe what’s most moving about Mazur’s mastery of form is the way it includes the fundamental balancing acts of everyday life, our little attempts to make sense of things, to set our ordinary affairs in their right relation—and, at times, unsettle them. Consider “Unveiling,” a poem occasioned by the unveiling of a mother’s gravestone:

I say to the named granite stone, to the
brown grass,
to the dead chrysanthemums, *Mother, I still*
have a
body, what else could receive my mind's
transmissions,
its dots and dashes of pain? I expect and get no
answer,
no loamy scent of her coral geraniums. She
who is now
immaterial, for better or worse, no longer
needs to speak
of wisdom, love and fury. *MAKE! DO! a*
note on our fridge
commanded. Here I am making,
unmaking, doing, undoing.

This poem seems to me emblematic of everything that makes Mazur and *Forbidden City* so vital to American poetry right now. Traveling deftly from raw, existential statement to notes on the fridge, Mazur’s poems are acts of embodiment, giving shape to experience, including the most painful and most ecstatic, the most monumental and most ordinary. I can’t think of another living poet who, while honoring both the need to give shape to life and the inevitability of “undoing,” has so successfully realized this passion for experience in all its tones and forms. ▣

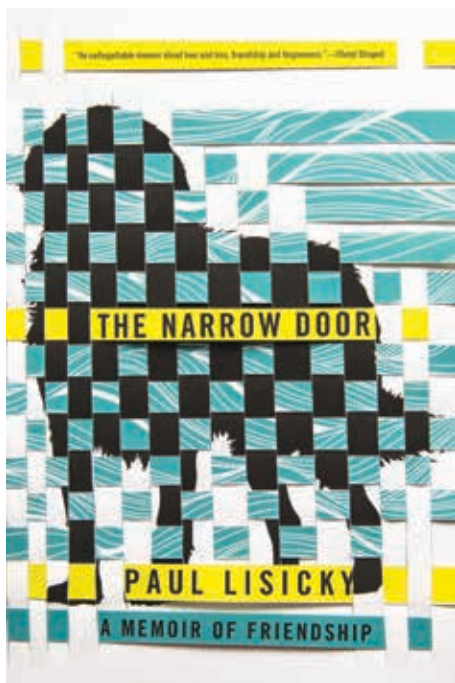
PETER CAMPION is the author most recently of *El Dorado*. The recipient of the Rome Prize and the Guggenheim Fellowship, he directs the creative writing program at the University of Minnesota.

The Narrow Door: A Memoir of Friendship

By Paul Lisicky

Graywolf Press, 2016

A BOOK REVIEW BY SARAH MESSER



WHILE READING Paul Lisicky’s new memoir, *The Narrow Door*, I felt as if I were standing outside a series of clear glass doors that offered glimpses into many years of the author’s friendships, love affairs, and life as a writer. The doors belonged to houses and apartments in New York City, Philadelphia, Fire Island, Nantucket, Palo Alto, a beach town in North Carolina, and other places. William Zinsser describes a memoir as “a window into a life,” a slice, a small part of a larger autobiography, and that is certainly true here. Lisicky has subtitled the book “a memoir of friendship,” specifically his decades-long friendship with the novelist Denise Gess, but the book contains many other friendships and losses too—lovers, parents, and animals. It is a book filled with friends, losing them, getting them back, losing them again, and how to face this impermanence. Some readers will remember that Lisicky was married to the poet Mark Doty (called simply “M”), but the book is not about that relationship, nor the end of their marriage (though it is present)—*The Narrow Door* is fundamentally a long, ragged love letter to Denise, whose death from cancer in 2010 forms the impetus and reason for this beautiful and completely new literary architecture. I can say, right here and now (in case you are wondering what kind of review this will be) that I read the book pretty much nonstop over the course of two days, folding

down corners of pages and filling it with sticky notes and pencil marks, in awe of its power, honesty, heartbreak, and innovative form.

The book begins with Paul, a closeted young fiction writer, caught in the headlights of fellow graduate student Denise’s glamour and recent success; she’d just had a novel accepted for publication, she’d been to the prestigious Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, she’d had an affair with a Famous Writer. Lisicky describes her movie star qualities, her “wattage,” which dims and brightens over the years as her career stutters and his takes off. Paul winds up marrying a Famous Writer, publishing books, winning awards. So the book is also about literary friendships and their boons and treachery—Denise had a tendency to be as competitive and jealous as she was generous and genius. Lisicky is honest about this, and yet it never detracts from the narrative or our love for Denise. No one, it seems, is safe from her charms, no matter how badly she acts. In a heartbreaking scene near the end of her life, when Denise is dying of cancer, she asks Paul if she can put her feet up on his lap as they both sit on the couch. “See how we’ve been a little bit in love all this time, and not able to say it?” he writes.

Much of the book is about this too—what can’t be said, what needs to be left out. How does one write a history of a friendship, indeed the history of one’s own life? Perhaps this is what we ask ourselves, when someone we love dies—how can we tell the world everything about this person? But Paul Lisicky doesn’t attempt it: “words fail in the face of strong emotion . . . the list would never tell the complete story.”

So what we get, as readers, is a friendship that unfolds through snippets of conversation, arguments, e-mails, phone calls, a blossoming love, a meditation on Vincent van Gogh, a new dog, deaths, and other endings: “What happens when you die? The broken light switch in the kitchen, the doorknob glistening in the saucer by the window. How can you get in?” Structurally we are let in through chapters arranged around themes—Volcano, Wave, Furious, Famous Writers—and within these chapters, smaller sections arranged only by year—2010, 1986, 1998, etc. For lovers of the linear, I can say that the book pretty much progresses in chronological order, albeit in a sidwinding way. But there’s a lot we’re never told. We never find out when and how Paul met his own Famous Writer, M. We are never shown Denise’s childhood, or hear much about how

she raised her own daughter, or about Paul's family background (but if you are interested you should read his earlier memoir, *Famous Builder*). No, this is a book of perfect and perfectly appropriate fragments; its content seems to fit only in this kind of unusual approach. Perhaps the two, form and content, arose simultaneously here.

Lisicky writes:

I see how a book becomes your house. But soon you are just a function of your house. The house tells you what you want, how you should live. At the same time, everything that comes into your life goes into the house. The house transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, and without it, you'd never even know yourself, never even know that all those choices and consequences mattered. Your life has purpose inside that house, in its moldings and floorboards, in the way the light falls on the windowsill, and you pass on that house to others.

One thing I admire about this book is its refusal to trap us in narrative, because, as any good writer knows, narrative and point of view are inherently limiting. The book acknowledges that there were "dozens of Denises," and also that Paul's life "would be larger if I could hold the dark side of Denise alongside the bright." What Lisicky has created is a "lyric memoir"; it moves through associate logic more like a poem than a traditional narrative. It mirrors the way a poetic mind works, the way memory works—in pieces. But this is not a shattered view, and we never feel as if anything is actually missing, stunned as we are by the array of beautiful mosaic jewels. Something like this—a meditation on his love, M, when their relationship ends up on the rocks—might appear suddenly:

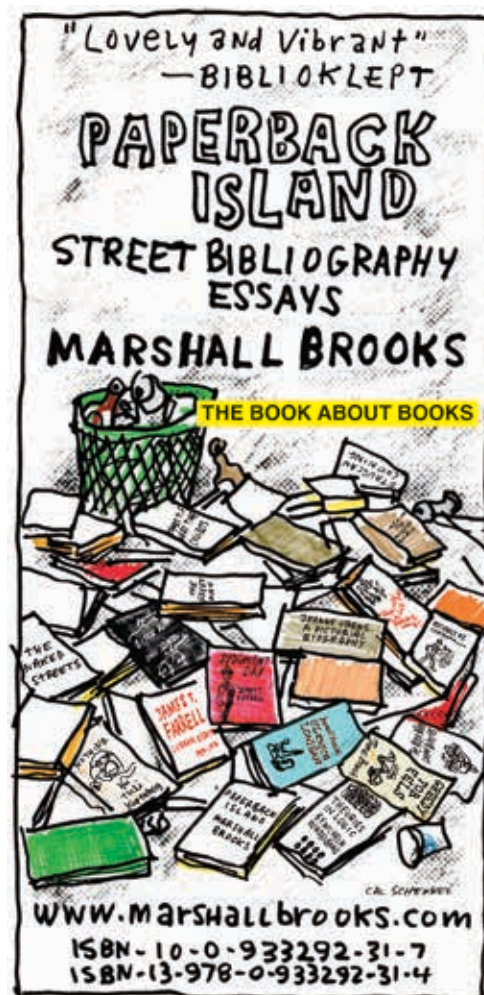
My protector. My protected. My badge. My torch. My fugitive. My furnace. My doorway. My duty. My desert. My daystar. My well. My harbor. My wave. My promontory. My marshland. My dune. My plainsong. My psalm. My fascicle. My dictionary. My archive. My tower. My giant. My thunderclap. My spine. My rivering. My sprawl. My signet. My scarf. My fly-by-night. My bankruptcy. My secrecy. My greening. My saltwater. My howling. My yellow moon.

In the last sentences of the book—after Denise leaves us with her radiation halo of chick-white hair, after Lisicky's mother, surrounded by family in her hospital bed, leaves, after M, returning from a walk with the new dog, ends the marriage—Lisicky writes, "I don't yet know what to make of any of this."

And yet he keeps asking questions, building this kaleidoscope of beauty, infusing meaning into form: "I want to believe that she's impossible to know, as all of us are impossible to know. How else to keep her alive in me?" For all of

us who have lost beloved people, who stand in that nowhere land of grief and longing, with the heartbreaking beauty of memory, *The Narrow Door* is not a road map for a way out of these feelings, it's an entire house built of them. It is a gift, a place to live, one of the best portraits, and memoirs of friendship, you might ever read. ▀

SARAH MESSER is the author of two poetry collections, *Bandit Letters* (*New Issues*, 2001) and *Dress Made of Mice* (*Black Lawrence*, 2015), a history/memoir, *Red House* (Viking, 2004), and a book of translations, *Having Once Paused: Poems of Zen Master Ikky (1394–1481)* (University of Michigan Press, 2015). She has received grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mellon Foundation, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Michigan Council for the Arts, and others. Currently, she runs *One Pause Poetry* (onepausepoetry.org) in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



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The Abundance: Narrative Essays Old and New

By Annie Dillard

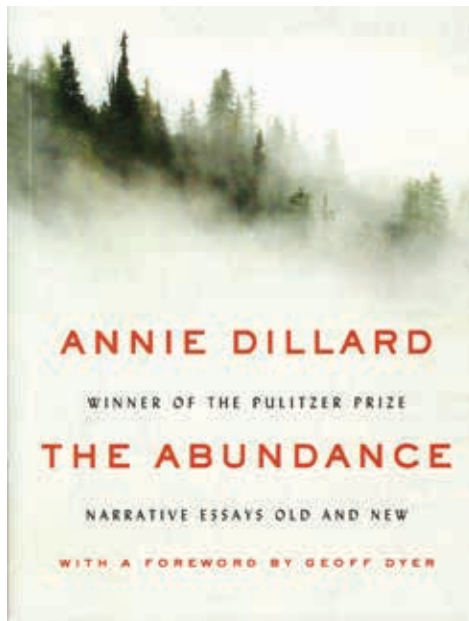
HarperCollins (Ecco), 2016

A BOOK REVIEW BY SUE HARRISON

THERE HAS BEEN MAJOR BUZZ about Annie Dillard's new book, *The Abundance*, and with good reason. Dillard is an acknowledged master at what she does and a compilation of twenty-two recently revised essays from seven of her well-known books is a delicious feast.

I had the opportunity to meet with Dillard at her home in Key West. It's in the Old Town section, a warren of sleepy streets with houses tucked up fairly close to the sidewalk. Some are hidden behind tropical foliage, some are behind fences, and some snug up to tidy lawns. Chickens wander the streets (Key West is famous for its feral double-toed cats and wild chickens) and though it is high season, it feels calm these few blocks away from the main drag of Duval Street.

Dillard lives with her husband, the biographer Robert Richardson, in a house that has ducked the enveloping arm of gentrification that has embraced so many of its neighbors. There is a narrow front porch opening into a central hallway. Bob's office is to the left, Annie's



almost-anecdotal pieces about family jokes, visiting Chinese writers, and growing up. Each had to solidly stand alone to make the cut. She, thankfully, ordered the essays in the new book very carefully to give the reader a break between those with crackling, unrelenting intensity.

The Abundance begins with the surreal experience of "Total Eclipse," in which the day starts as normal and quickly goes crazy, pinwheeling away from reality. And the book ends with an equally surreal and expansive view of life in "An Expedition to the Pole."

In "Expedition," she puts two unlikely essay subjects together that appear to have nothing in common and yet they do. In this two-pronged essay, a woman sits through a tepid church service filled with perky guitars and more enthusiasm than deliverance while polar expedition after expedition unfolds into tragedy. In one expedition, Captain Oates, knowing his frostbitten feet will fatally slow the others, "stepped outside the tent one night to freeze himself in a blizzard, saying to the others, 'I am just going outside and may be some time.'"

The much-revered Pulitzer Prize-winner has shown over and over again her ability to write prose that is stunning, sometimes literally. In "The Weasel," Dillard writes about having this same feeling herself when she encounters a weasel unexpectedly in the wild:

I was stunned into stillness, twisted backward on the tree trunk. Our eyes locked, and someone threw away the key.

Our look was as if two lovers, or deadly enemies, met unexpectedly on an overgrown path when each had been thinking of something else: a clearing blow to the gut. It was a bright blow to the brain, a sudden beating of brains, with all the charge and intimate grate of rubbed balloons. It emptied our lungs. It felled the forest, moved the fields, and drained the pond; the world dismantled and tumbled into that black hole of eyes.

Passages like this set her work apart and make it difficult to categorize her as a writer. Clearly, at her most focused, she approaches the world with a dazzling clarity of observation and the skill to share everything she sees and feels. She often veers far from everyday description and into language more like the visceral grip of poetry than prose. But just when it is almost too much, she gives you a chance to breathe.

Her books range from her pellucid descriptions of nature to talking about the writing life.

is to the right. A Donald Trump piñata hangs on the wall across from the stairs, and down the hall rooms open out and end in a kitchen with a wildly multicolored tile countertop. The tile was here when they bought the house and they never thought to change it, she says, as she gets another cup of coffee and then settles down to talk. We start the interview here, overlooking the compact backyard, before setting out for a nearby restaurant for lunch and more talk.

Asked how the new book came about, she says a friend suggested it. "I thought, that's not bad," she says. She also thought it would be quick to do, but it wasn't. "Six, eight months, that's what it took. I can't believe I was so stupid—I thought it would be easy. There was nothing easy about it."

And when she talked to her agent, he thought it was a terrible idea. "I spent all of the last twelve months on the phone with my agent, who was trying to convince me I was dead. 'Oh, you are dead.' But I feel alive. 'It's over for you.' It's tough. He's young and gay and in Manhattan and in publishing and he knows what's happening and it's not me." She pauses, thinking of all the attention the book has received. "He has been seriously surprised."

Fortunately, her publisher thought it was a great idea and she started on the revisions. "Some things I completely rewrote," she says, "and then decided they didn't really fit the book after all."

In the end, she chose a mixture of transcendental essays about life and meaning and

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She has also written two novels, *The Living* and *The Maytrees*, and it was after the second novel, published almost a decade ago, that she stopped producing new work. She said then that she was done and wanted to go out on a high note and felt she had. There have been questions and articles written about her decision not to write more books, but few answers. She keeps it simple and doesn't elaborate when I ask if she's really retired from writing: "I can't write. It retired on me."

However, she is happy to talk about her process of writing. She talks about good sentences and how seductive the pleasure of writing them can be—and yet, the writer must be able to resist them during revisions and make the hard choices and view the sentences as merely pieces of the bigger picture.

"You have to be cruel," she says. "If it's not doing anything for the reader you have to take it out. I think that's what Hemingway and those people meant when they said you have to have balls to write. They just mean the courage to kill your own babies, the sentences."

In "A Writer in the World," she compares writing sentences to wrestling alligators:

The sensation of writing a book is the sensation of spinning, blinded by love and daring. . . . Now it feels like alligator wrestling, at the level of the sentence. You are a Seminole

alligator wrestler. Half-naked, with your two bare hands, you hold and fight a sentence's head while its tail tries to knock you over.

These days, she says, she is "up to her ass in alligators."

She talks not only about sentences but about entire passages that she loved, wrote into essays, and then, later, took out. It's painful, she says, but necessary: "It's really hard. But if you've done it a lot, already made the decision a million times, you can do it. Do I want to feel good right now or do I want to write a good book? You have to want to write a good book. The more you make the decision, the easier it gets. You say, I've already decided I want to write a good book and here is this passage I love so much, but, it's off with its head."

The essay in the book continues, "At its best, the sensation of writing is that of any unmerited grace. It is handed to you, but only if you look for it. You search, you break your heart, your back, your brain, and then—and only then—it is handed to you."

If reading her most focused and intense work leads to mind-bending exhilaration, writing it must turn the world inside out. Can she, can anyone live at that level of concentration and complete immersion in the truth of the moment?

"Well, that's what Buddhists do, live in the present and be intensely noticing and feeling," she says. "They are always having to recall themselves back. People are always in the past or the future and miss the present."

Despite the value of living in the present, Dillard points out that it is often in recollection that observations crystallize for a writer. She notes several who wrote about their lives but also from a great distance, such as Willa Cather writing about the Nebraska prairie from New York City. It is good, Dillard suggests, to do that, to write about winter in summer: "I have a theory. Say you have a colander, some sort of sieve, and you have memories, zillions of memories. . . . All these things attached to your memory. The more time and distance you have from these memories, eventually only the big, bright ones remain and those are the ones you want."

In this compilation, that is what she does time and time again. She gives us the big ones, the bright ones, the ones we want. ❧

SUE HARRISON writes fiction, memoir, and non-fiction. Her travel essays and memoir about Florida can be found on her website www.myoldflorida.com. She is a prizewinning journalist and was the arts and entertainment editor and writer for the Provincetown Banner, a weekly newspaper in Massachusetts, for fifteen years.

Roll Deep: Poems

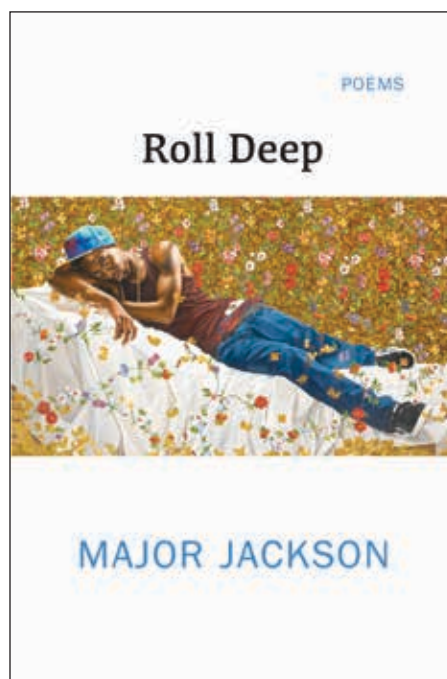
By Major Jackson

W. W. Norton, 2015

A BOOK REVIEW BY KELLE GROOM

IN READING Major Jackson's brilliant fourth collection of poems, *Roll Deep*, with its wide breadth of travels—geographical, historical, personal, literary—I was reminded of Elizabeth Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel." In this title poem from her 1965 collection, Bishop asks, "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? / Where should we be today?" She continues, "Oh, must we dream our dreams / and have them, too?"

In *Roll Deep*, the answer to that last question is yes. The speaker values mystery, hope, home, loved ones. He travels and returns for the voyage itself, taking his crew with him, travel a way to open the door. The book begins with the poem "Reverse Voyage," in which the past is alive, but "all's remixed." It's silence, "hidden deep inside / the ventricle caves of my body's chambers," that brings the speaker back, calls him to stay. His reverse voyage is also part of a "perpetual voyage," begun when the speaker was a boy, "already awake" with the desire to roam: "rolling deep,



/ re-forming constantly and away." The poem sets us on our way, traveling in section 2, "Urban Renewal," a sequence of poems that began in Jackson's first collection, *Leaving Saturn* (University of Georgia Press, 2002), and continued in his second book, *Hoops* (Norton, 2006).

We begin in Greece, where the search for the new and hidden in "The Cyclades Blues Suite" so emboldens the speaker and his wife that they "unpeel" their bathing suits "like human wrappers," as if they'd become something other than human, freed of more than their clothes. With wit and musicality, the poem moves swiftly and humorously as "the sun conducted its trade routes" of the body and "urchins / . . . fired missiles." It luxuriates in the pleasure of "glazed-over eyes" and "our lives cured right on the spot," to shift in the final line to an illness returned. "Paradise dwindles to a speck."

That awareness of unpredictable loss and grief is addressed immediately in the next poem of this suite, with the exhortation: "Never get

used to this: the morning slow prayer of palm / leaves." The poems move through Spain to Córdoba, where the speaker can't decipher the road signs: "its dots, marks like smoke stilled from incense." It leads to a questioning reminiscent of Bishop, "But why travel so far?" Here, the arches of the Alhambra allow him to "imagine the body passing through like a key into infinity." It's another kind of freedom, but we're still firmly in this world, the speaker's crew expanding as well as he travels, "collecting a thousand faces."

Jackson creates landscape through the senses, in a resonant melding of sound and image. In Brazil, we begin with "Berimbau": "You, bow-shaped recipe of opulent whines / on steel wire, who keeps the buzz on an acrobat's spine." Then, moving again to overarching human concerns: "how the last goodbye / is often a surprise." Despite, or because of, the varying landscapes, we are looped back to meditations on mortality, loss, and identity. Loss is not confined to the individual in these poems—they are concerned with the histories of communities past and present.

In Kenya, in "The Dadaab Suite," the speaker is starkly self-aware: "I have come to Dadaab like an actor / on a press release, unprepared for the drained faces / of famine-fleeing refugees." The poems that follow employ the form of security briefings and the testimony of a child soldier, allowing us to listen to the people of the place, to "unearth a feeling for a people who are not your own."

The sequence ends in Italy, with "The Augustan Suite," and a meditation on the "first year of marriage" and the loved one: "she would remain like the horizon whose light / increased." This circling back echoes a line from "Block Party," the opening section of "Urban Renewal" in *Leaving Saturn*: "What amount of love can express enough gratitude / for those reformulations, life ruptured then looped back."

Section 3's "Mighty Pawns" is a masterfully precise thirty-two-line, one-sentence poem. It introduces a schoolmate, offering "a better picture of Earl's ferocity":

the toughest kid
on my block in North Philadelphia,
bow-legged and ominous, could beat
any man or woman in ten moves playing white

The lack of an end stop until the final line keeps us connected to Earl. The poem moves through Earl's travel to Yugoslavia, and beyond:

to frustrate the bearded
masters at the Belgrade Chess Association, . . .
into the faint light of his Section 8 home . . .
slats
of stairs missing where Baby-boy gets stuck
trying to ascend to a dominion foreign to you and me
with its loud timbales and drums blasting down
from the closed room of his cousin whose mother
stands on a corner on the other side of town
all times of day and night

By the end of the poem, the speaker and the reader are both beside Earl:

he stands near you
at a downtown bus-stop in a jacket a size too
small, hunching his shoulders around his ears,
as you imagine the checkered squares of his poverty
and anger, and pray he does not turn his precise gaze
too long in your direction for fear he blames
you and proceeds to take your Queen.

Jackson finds beauty everywhere, praising the abandoned truck in "Dreams of Permanence," and "some shy kid who longs / merely for the miraculous,— a recognition," tagging the black-windowed truck at night with "a made-up name like gold till it glitters." In section 4's "Aubade," the speaker praises "these blissful seasons," and issues the invitation to "let drop your sarong, / the wind high on your skin," with the reminder that "tomorrow is never / insured." Jackson is well aware of "the world's high-rise loneliness." In "Night Steps," there is a list of things the speaker will never forget: "blue-eyeshadow / like slashes beneath my mother's brow." It recalls a line from *Hoops*: "What legions of lines my fist / inscribes calls back your days." And the love that propels this calling echoes Jackson's "Roof of the World" in *Holding Company* (Norton, 2010): "I hear our prayers rising. I sing to you, now."

The final poem is "Why I Write Poetry." Poetry is itself a kind of travel. Reading *Roll Deep* had brought to mind Elizabeth Bishop's "Questions of Travel." After experiencing a breathtaking range of travel in these poems, Jackson closes with answers:

Because my son is as old as the stars . . .
Because a single drop of rain is hope for the thirsty . . .
Because I have not thanked enough . . .
Because I wish I could speak three different languages
but have to settle for the language of business
and commerce . . .
Because I better git it in my soul . . .
Because I write with a pen whose supply of ink
comes from the sea . . .
Because punctuation is my jury and the moon is my judge
Because my best friend in fourth grade chased
city buses from corner to corner
Because his cousin's father could not stop looking
up at the sky after his return from the war
Because parataxis is just another way of making ends meet
Because I have been on a steady diet of words
since the age of three.

Elizabeth Bishop's "Questions of Travel" closes with this final question:

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?

In the poems of *Roll Deep*, it's not a question of either/or, home or travel. In traveling, Major Jackson brings home with him, creates it, and offers it to us. 🏠

KELLE GROOM is the author of four poetry collections: Underwater City (University Press of Florida), Luckily, Five Kingdoms, and Spill, forthcoming from Anbinga Press, as well as a memoir, I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl (Simon & Schuster), a New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice. Her poems have appeared in Best American Poetry, Ploughshares, Poetry, the New Yorker, and the New York Times, and are forthcoming in American Poetry Review. A 2014 NEA Fellow, Groom is MFA faculty at Sierra Nevada College, Lake Tahoe, and Director of the Summer Workshops at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

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Honey from the Lion and Allegheny Front

By Matthew Neill Null

Lookout Books, 2015; Sarabande Books, 2016

A BOOK REVIEW BY ROB PHELPS

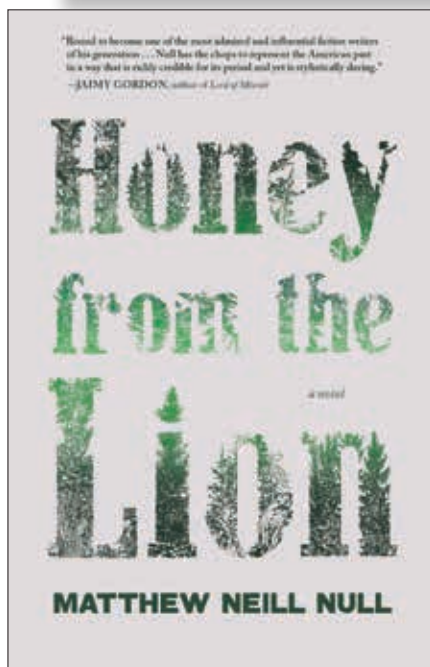
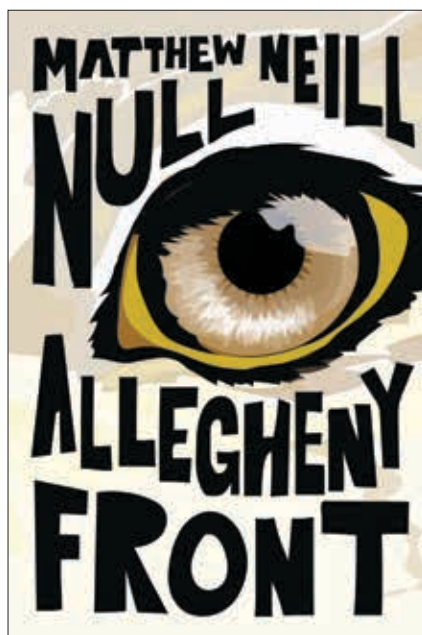
GOOD THINGS CAME IN THREES for Matthew Neill Null during his last year as the writing coordinator for the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. In September 2015, just before his last group of Fellows arrived, Null's first novel, *Honey from the Lion*, was published. In May 2016, as the Fellows left town, his first book of short stories, *Allegheny Front*, was released. This was also the year when he and his wife, Tal Zamir, welcomed their first child, Henry, into the world.

Null, who was himself a fiction Fellow from 2011 to 2012, returned to Provincetown to join the Work Center staff in fall 2013. "It's been perfect," Null says. "Being at the Work Center is a perfect situation for anyone who's a writer or a visual artist, whether you're a Fellow or on staff. Pretty much all the staff members are creative artists in some fashion. I've been here for three years, I have finished a couple books, and I think it's time to give this opportunity to someone else."

Null has another good reason to move on to his next chapter. As the recipient of the Rome Prize in Literature from the American Academy in Rome, he will soon head to Italy with his family for an eleven-month residency. Null was chosen as one of only two writers among the thirty-one international artists and scholars named for the 2016–2017 fellowship. "Pennies from heaven," he calls it. The Rome program is similar to the FAWC residency program in Provincetown in that both provide time and space for artists to do the creative work of their choice. The Rome fellows, however, don't apply for the program; rather, they're nominated anonymously and are not even told that they've been in the running until after national juries have selected their finalists. "It was a big surprise," he says.

Meanwhile, Null has been busy dividing his time between his responsibilities at the Work Center overseeing the writing Fellows, polishing up his two books, taking *Honey from the Lion* on a national book tour, and sharing the challenges of first-time parenthood with his wife. Now, he says, he's ready to get back to some nose-to-the-grindstone writing time. "That's the plan," he says. "Lately, I haven't had time to write any fiction of note. For me, I really need to clear the decks to do it. I'm pretty deep into a novel, a couple hundred pages in, and that's what I think I'll return to when I'm in Rome."

If distance enhances perspective, then this overseas move could only sharpen Null's creative focus. Provincetown gave that to him as he completed his first two books, both set



deep in his homeland of rural West Virginia. His family has lived there since colonial times, and Null has dedicated his fiction to exploring his cultural heritage and its roots.

In *Honey from the Lion*, Null mines the lost history of forgotten souls from this region. The novel opens with a trio of Civil War soldiers of privileged New York background stumbling upon the wilds of West Virginia and making a pact to come back and exploit the region's natural resources after the war, which is exactly what they do.

Null writes about this in the very first chapter:

They tore sweetness out of that rough unlikely place. They wrestled it down and made it give. . . . By Theodore Roosevelt's second term, the timber logged out of West Virginia could reach the moon and back twice over. . . . But for small interruptions, the boom would hold for years. Small interruptions no one would recall.

With these opening lines, he alludes to the wrongs his characters will strive to right in the ensuing pages and warns us that their hopes and dreams and efforts to take back their land will fail. Their struggles will amount to no more than a forgotten "interruption"—a historical hiccup.

The outcome is hopeless. The author has virtually given away the ending of his novel before the first major character has even been introduced. So why might a reader go on reading?


It comes down to Null's narrative voice, with all its Southern accent and audacity. There's a command in it, a note that inspires faith that something possibly even more important than plot and character is about to be explored.

One of the major storylines begins to unfold in chapter two when a man named Cur, born on a farm around the turn of the last century, is forced to flee from his home in the wake of a forbidden-love scandal. His journey tosses him into the time-honored role of the penniless young adventurer making his way in the world. In Cur's case, however, there are no Horatio Alger payoffs. Cur's path leads him to a logging camp on the brink of a brutal worker's strike.

What happens to Cur, the logging-camp union organizers, and all of the others caught up in the looming fight will be nothing more than one of history's "small interruptions."

This interruption, nonetheless, is grand. Null's descriptions, from mountain woods to great big populations of logging camps and boomtowns, are at once richly evocative and economically described. Null is a writer who captures immense imagery and ideas with few words. He is equally skilled when detailing nuances of character.

He introduces us, often quite intimately, to a varied cast of characters that includes scores of loggers, speculators, a minister losing his congregation, a Syrian peddler yearning to put down roots, a Slovenian beauty posing as both prostitute and office clerk to pass arms and information to strikers, a horse whisperer, a



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starving panther, Italian immigrants, beggars, bankers, politicians, shopkeepers, grave-diggers, and corrupt cops.

Null writes about the novel on his website:

[It is] a history of daily toil and desire. It is a book of dreams, of the drifter and the clerk, of the washerwoman and the panther. I wanted to write America's shadow story—the characters [that] popular history crops from the frame. My home state of West Virginia has produced no great men, in the old sense of that phrase, no presidents, but hundreds of thousands have lived and died there, a rich human pageant. This novel is my bid to give them back their stories.

In *Allegheny Front*, Null widens his historical scope while honing in on particular characters, revealing whole lives in a few pages as only good short stories can do. In each of these nine stories, the protagonists carry the weight of legends but are as familiar as any reader's family member or best friend.

"My book of stories spans two hundred years of history in West Virginia," he says. "It goes from the pre-Civil War era nearly to the present, shifting perspectives from many different characters, different times, and different settings. The binding force is that they all have to do with interactions between the people and the landscape."

With a diverse range of characters—including hardscrabble farmers and traveling confidence men fighting over small plots of land, eighteenth-century loggers and their whitewater-rafting tour-guide descendants plying the same river flumes, drug dealers and sentimental heroes, fishery biologists and politicians, even families of wild bears that go from happy "wobbling clowns" to mean scavengers—the stories combine Null's sharp perceptions of human nature with a setting that serves as a powerful catalyst, as we see in this excerpt from "Something You Can't Live Without":

The only thing Cartwright knew about McBride, today's prospect, was that the farmer was a sucker, though the few neighbors around there would have told Cartwright that no one knew the valley better than honest Sherman McBride—the creeks that bred trout, the cave that held flint—except for the two boys he raised off those mouthfuls of corn that rose from the fields and strained for sun. Even so, honesty would be the man's downfall. Cartwright gazed up at the Allegheny Mountains that were a series of blue lines on the horizon. This was long before the forests were scoured off the mountains and the coal chipped from their bellies, before blight withered the chestnut stands. A dozen passenger pigeons trickled through the sky, the first Cartwright had seen this year despite all his travels.

"In West Virginia, it's very hard to live," Null explains. "You live close to the bone. It's a struggle. Because it's such a difficult place to live, people are faced with the situation of having to destroy a landscape they love in piecemeal fashion just to live there. That's a very tricky moral and ethical situation. It's very easy for people from the outside to condemn that, but I find the people who are most vocal about condemning it are doing so from a considerably more comfortable place. They really don't understand the nuances of that situation. No one wants to take part in a situation that destroys the landscape. These are people who have a long family tie to the local landscape. They are always dealing with the struggle to live there."

Null is chronicling this long-fought struggle so that each of his characters, rich with hard-lived, real-life experience, might, as he writes in one story, "live on on [our] tongues, not forever, but a while, the nearest thing to forever." ❧

ROB PHELPS is the managing editor of Boston Spirit magazine and a freelance writer and book editor living in Quincy, Massachusetts. After moving to Provincetown in 1998, he worked for the Provincetown Advocate and Banner (for which he was arts editor from 2012 to 2015), while earning his MFA in creative writing through the low-residency program at Bennington College. He has also lived in New York, where he edited college textbooks in fashion and design for Condé Nast Publications.



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Installation shot from the exhibition at Berta Walker Gallery, 2015 ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF BERTA WALKER GALLERY

David Kaplan

SECRET GLIMPSES, LURKING IN THE LIGHT OF SHADOWS

By Christopher Busa

THE TALENTED DAVID KAPLAN, cofounder and curator of the now ten-year-old Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Provincetown, this year has ventured into Conceptual installation art as an examination of the interstices in the actor's art available during the quiet moments between appearances on the stage, when the actor may contemplate an individual and personal relationship with the assumed mask of her or his character. For three weeks, beginning ten days before the 2015 festival last fall, Kaplan and the photographer Ride Hamilton collaborated in creating an installation at Provincetown's Berta Walker Gallery, with photographs and scenery focused on the backstory of *The Hotel Plays*, directed by Kaplan and produced by the Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in New Orleans. These larger-than-life scenes depict in-between moments from the Hotel Plays of Tennessee Williams, four plays that expose the hush-hush whisperings that peel paint off the walls in the hallways and stairwells of transient boardinghouses.

All of the images in the exhibition shine with a noir sepia tint, the twilight that the French call "the hour of the wolf," a strange transition between daylight color and the black and white of the night. Hamilton has served as the official photographer for the Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in New Orleans, beginning a decade ago, immediately after Hurricane Katrina. "I like secrets," Hamilton said. "Secrets are like a doctor peering into a patient's body." He chooses to use a .95 aperture vintage lens—the same aperture Stanley Kubrick used in his film *Barry Lyndon*, and NASA uses in space—explaining, "It can see more than the human eye. In the dark, it becomes an X-ray."

What is extraordinary about Ride Hamilton's photographs is that they are not about actors performing. They are rather about the in-between moments immediately after the audience has left the room and the actor has disappeared from the stage. Sometimes the actors are waiting outside before performing, listening for cues, or perhaps they are suddenly realizing they have just enough time to put on their

makeup. Or perhaps they are standing next to each other, but not in the same play—two actors from two different plays happen to meet in the hallway, talking with each other outside the play. Kaplan relishes that subliminal state for its visual impact. This is what is unique about the peripheral power of twilight, where the fleeting, passing, transitory instance becomes paramount. It is the place of meditation, a mediating between the physical world and the spiritual world. That is the unique genius of Tennessee Williams.

Kaplan conveyed his passion to Hamilton to create these in-between times, moments of intense reflection when the actor goes into character, when it's difficult to tell where the actor ends and the character begins.

"The interesting thing about the Hotel Plays," Kaplan observed, "is the hotel, its physically transitory nature. Williams, to put it inelegantly, thought of the hotel as the body that the soul moves through: that it came from somewhere, resided, then left. For a while, Williams wanted to call his autobiography *Flee, Flee, This Sad Hotel*. Always, in a hotel play,



Ride Hamilton and David Kaplan, *Offstage retouching makeup, listening for a cue upstairs*, 2015, gold-toned photograph, 18 by 24 inches

death is waiting outside the door. So what you see in a hotel room are souls on a 'time-out,' souls in defiance of death, leaving or not leaving, or rushing toward, but we see them in a moment of trance, a moment of suspension within the body. Very often, in a hotel play, there is the sound of a clock, or a knock on the door, a repetitive heartbeat, footsteps—something that relates to the passage of time.

"Another important element of theater for Tennessee Williams—and other playwrights, García Lorca among them—is what's happening

offstage, what's happening in the hallway, what's happening in the hotel room outside the hotel room, what's happening outside the hotel. Everything that we overhear puts what we are perceiving and hearing in perspective. Sometimes it's the possibility of happiness. Sometimes it's the sense of other lives going on. Sometimes it's the mystery of other lives going on. What's miraculous in a performance is that you can live the experience. You can have the actors and the performers in a room and have the sound of activity in other rooms."

The Kaplan-Hamilton installation at the Berta Walker Gallery summoned the experience of the production of the *Hotel Plays* at the Hermann-Grima House in New Orleans, now a distinguished museum. The former mansion, in the heart of the French Quarter, became the intensely intimate setting for small groups to move from room to room with the actors, almost as if the audience were included in the various plays. *Green Eyes*, written in 1970, is Williams's closest inspection of the sexual undercurrents lurking in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, explicitly stripping jealousy of any distance or decorum. The small bed in the hotel room explodes into an enormous arena of psychosexual revelation, fueled by irrational jealousy, in which spontaneous, involuntary utterances shock even the speakers.

In 2009, when the idea of a hotel setting was first being discussed for Tennessee Williams's plays in Provincetown's Gifford House Inn, Jef Hall-Flavin, executive director of the Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, mused about what fun it was to hear "sound leaks" in a hotel: "You are hearing the people next door going at it, whether they were fighting, making love, coupled with radio or television commentary or people talking in the halls—sound leaks, it loops in the other scenes. By the time we performed these plays in the Hermann-Grima House, built as a single-family house in 1831, Williams knew that it had become a boardinghouse in the 1920s for 'Christian women in distress.'"

In such a place, the spatial history made language resonate in the present. The sounds of footsteps in the hallways, the sounds of footsteps on the staircase, the sounds made in the rooms themselves were, Kaplan said, "like playing Beethoven on the original instruments."

Other elements emphasize this living representation of the narrative: the light piercing through windows, the illumination from lamps in the rooms, and also the reflections in mirrors. Mirrors are a way of relaying information to the audience, and in the Hermann-Grima House, because the audience is sitting around the bed—where audience is literally in front of audience—you very quickly understand that the audience can watch the play the way a movie editor does. You don't have to look at the scene head-on, but may see it from multiple angles. You can turn your head and see a reaction or turn your head and see a reflection. By putting together these different perspectives, the audience can create divergent narratives. Mirrors literalize the idea of reflection, including quiet moments when an actor may sit without expressing thoughts. Seeing an actor's image reflected in a mirror allows one to feel a direct access to his mind.

Dwindling light implies an occasion of darkness, and this is reminiscent of Williams's oracular play, *Orpheus Descending*, his mythological evocation of the lute player entering the underworld via the enchantment of his music. In one movie version, Orpheus enters the underworld by passing through a mirror, as if the mirror dissolves into a flow of water that one slips into, a reflective substance, like a river sweeping one away. Williams's work inspires this kind of poetic and introspective metaphor.

Just as in Japanese haiku, in which the poem's meaning is resolved in the mind of the reader, Kaplan's aim is to help the audience complete the artwork—the magical dynamic is achieved by the audience's recognition. He credits Bertolt Brecht for reinforcing the notion that the problem is not resolved in the performance, but left to the audience to conclude. He strives, in his direction, to help the audience assemble their own route to the end.

I asked Kaplan to comment on how he works with actors to bring



out these moments of surrender, when the character seems to break through her or his persona into genuine authenticity.

"I am interested in actors who think," he replied. "I like when you see an actor listening to music. I like when you see an actor waiting. I like when you see an actor pausing for a dynamic reason. And I love when the audience is prompted into their inner thinking by the physical presence of the actors doing that thinking, humming like a tuning fork that has been struck." Silence, therefore, becomes an opportunity to expand, extend, and exhaust the impulse with its own reverberations. "We all know," he explained, "if you walk into a room and your dog is sitting upright and looking out the window keenly, you will also look keenly out the window. That attention is contagious. How much more so with a human being—to come across someone who is in that twilight place!"

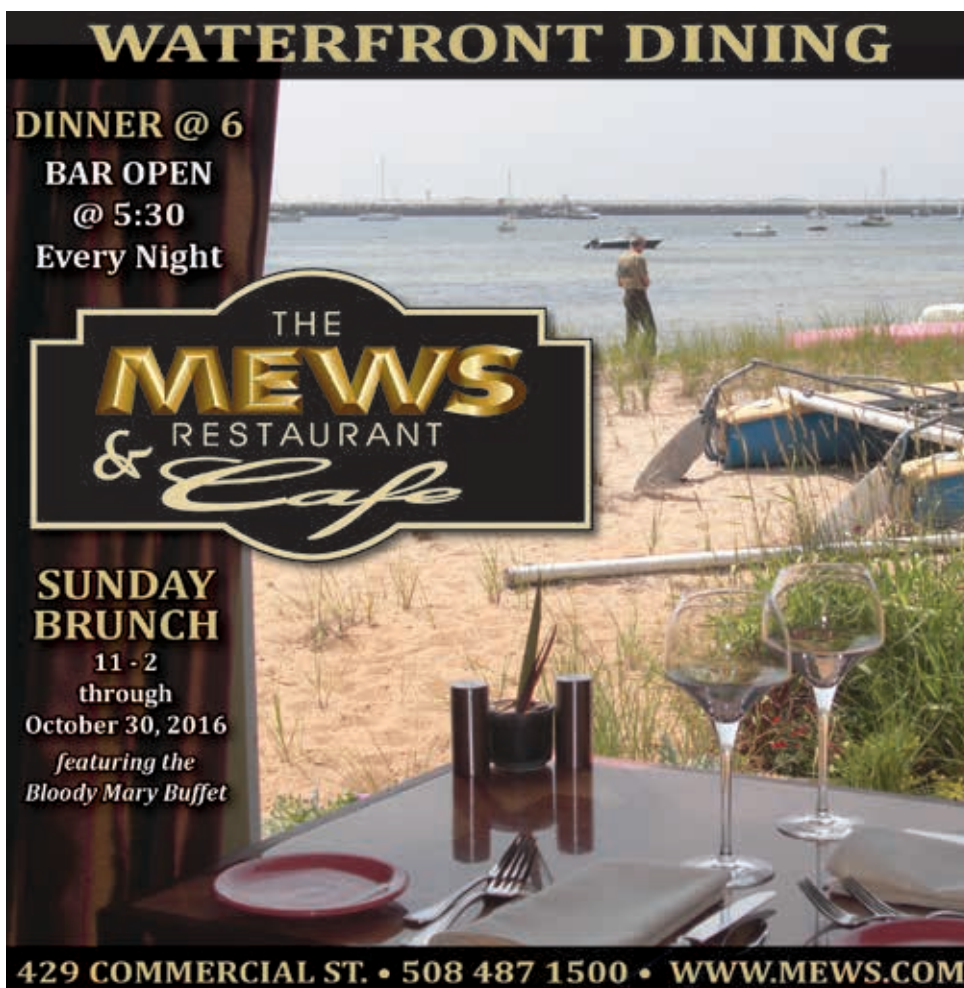
If theater concentrates only on the dynamic of emotion, Kaplan believes it is "promiscuous." Brecht's criticism of a certain kind of drama was that it sought to teach people to have an emotion in common, a mass emotion, without thinking. If German thinkers developed the idea of the sublime as the highest aim in art, Brecht developed a great distrust of this aim. Like Brecht, Kaplan favors unease in the audience, forcing resolution, not by the spectacle, but by personal struggle. "That," Kaplan said, "requires not just emotion, but thinking."

Kaplan's metaphor of the tuning fork, humming, is like the sound of silent thought, the vibration or tension that occupies the still moment. The drama is in the suspension, holding the audience, keeping them hanging in the air and expectant on the edge of their seats. The significance of what happens requires an audience to complete it. Ideas come into being on the occasion of experience. Experience itself activates latent ideas.

Kaplan knows that the script or the text that is meant to be performed is like a recipe for baking a cake. You can read the ingredients, but until you combine them, whip the eggs, put the concoction in the oven, and wait a certain amount of time, you don't have a cake, you just have a recipe. The text of a play is simply a recipe. Kaplan, a consummate director, has devoted his life to creating the kind of animated existence that happens in the crucible of the stage.

Using the lens of his focus on Tennessee Williams, Kaplan plans to continue to push boundaries in his productions and challenge audiences to see new things in other playwrights. This year, he plans to concentrate on Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill. Both playwrights loved Provincetown, as Kaplan does, "because the land is crumbling into the sea and the sea is chafing on the land. Looking out toward the horizon, the light evens out perspective, and it is no longer clear what is water and what is sky." ☒

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is founder and editorial director of Provincetown Arts Press.



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THE OUTER CAPE'S LIQUOR STORES



The Trans Moment

FOLLOWING THE ZEITGEIST IN *TANGERINE*

By Howard Karren

“Merry Christmas Eve, bitch.”

As I heard those four words—spoken by Sin-Dee Rella to her friend, Alexandra, in the very first scene of *Tangerine*, as an overhead camera peers down at their caressing hands beside a rainbow-sprinkled doughnut, offered by Sin-Dee as a Christmas present on a white paper bag on the yellow laminate tabletop at Donut Time on Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood—as I took it all in, I began to sense a shift in my worldview. And by the time the film was over, I was sure. There was something about the film’s aesthetic wholeness—the self-confidence radiating from its photography and editing, and the tone and rhythm of its storytelling—that gave ballast to my moral conviction. As a cisgender gay man, I was finally in sync with the Trans Moment.

Tangerine is in many ways a traditional buddy comedy—a classic Hollywood text, as film theorists might call it—one that follows the adventures of two friends, together and in parallel, crossing paths over the course of one day and one night, until they and the players in their orbit meet at once, climactically, at the same Donut Time as in the shot at the beginning, and sort out all the lies and illusions and betrayals from the bitter truth and the one saving grace that can be distilled from everything else: the loving friendship between Alexandra and Sin-Dee. That they are transgender hookers ful-

filling their needs and dreams on the sunbaked sprawl of lowlife Los Angeles does not alter the structure of the story, per se, but it does take the form and content of the imagery to a new and exciting place. By giving the subversive fringe of society such a classic platform, director Sean Baker and his cowriter, Chris Bergoch, achieve an extraordinary balance: they manage to tell the story first and foremost from the point of view of its transgender leads and yet provide cisgender viewers with a means of entrée into their world. The emotions evoked are then experienced universally, and the movie’s

Above: Christmas Eve at the Donut Time in Hollywood in *Tangerine*, with Alexandra (Mya Taylor) and Sin-Dee Rella (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez).
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

ostensible “message” becomes one of personal truth rather than sexual politics, even though they are ultimately the same.

I saw *Tangerine* in June 2015 at the Provincetown International Film Festival. It had premiered at Sundance in January and would open theatrically in July, grace the screens of film festivals around the world, stream on Netflix (for free) and Amazon (for a fee), and win a few nods in critics’ polls, indie awards, festival audience prizes, and the like. It also generated a lot of press and Internet attention for the inventively low-budget way that it was shot—entirely on an iPhone, with a newly designed anamorphic-lens adapter—and for its nonprofessional leading ladies (Mya Taylor as Alexandra and Kitana Kiki Rodriguez as Sin-Dee), who were essential assets to the filmmakers in researching and writing about the trans sex worker milieu. But whether *Tangerine* was more or less unheralded or unpopular did not matter to me. In my judgment, it was indubitably the best film of the year. And it had a priceless social marker: it was a movie with transgender heroines played by transgender actresses, brilliantly done. It raised the level of discourse on LGBT lives beyond a point of no return, and it gave me a forum to confront my own prejudices and to see the world and the cinema in a new way.

THE SEISMIC SHIFT in the zeitgeist regarding transgender people—what I am glibly calling the Trans Moment—is not new. It’s been rapidly accelerating for several years, as has its reactionary backlash. *Tangerine* is just one small part of that. Transgender men and women are now far more common in the media than they once were, and their depiction in the news and in fiction has become less of a freak show. Chaz Bono went public with his gender transition back in 2009, and Caitlyn Jenner—who, as Bruce, the Olympic athlete and Kardashian spouse, was even more of a celebrity than Chaz was as Chastity, the child of Sonny and Cher—came out as a transgender woman last year and made the cover of *Vanity Fair*, as part of a full glamour Annie Liebowitz shoot. Perhaps the most far-reaching change in the way transgender people are viewed has occurred on the small screen. Most notable is the award-winning Amazon sitcom *Transparent*, in which Jeffrey Tambor stars as a transgender mom, and this arrives on the heels of the award-winning Netflix women-in-prison series, *Orange Is the New Black*, featuring transgender actress Laverne Cox as a transgender inmate.

In theatrical movies, there is a growing list of cisgender actors who have played transgender characters, often with award recognition: it runs from Raquel Welch in *Myra Breckinridge* to Hilary Swank in *Boys Don’t Cry*, Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game* to Felicity Huffman in *Transamerica*, John Lithgow in *The World According to Garp* to Jared Leto in *Dallas Buyers Club*. That list was capped off last year by Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl*, a fictionalized account of the life of Lili Elbe, a tragic pioneer of sex-reassignment surgery, for which Redmayne was nominated



Fiercely jealous, Sin-Dee abducts the cisgender (“fish”) Dinah (left) in order to force their pimp, Chester, to choose which girl he loves.

for an Oscar and Alicia Vikander, playing Lili’s wife, won as Best Supporting Actress. Despite the dearth of transgender actors playing transgender parts in feature films, the trend is unmistakable. It has become so common for a cisgender actor to take on the “challenge” of a transgender role that it can easily be interpreted as a cynical professional ploy—Oscar bait.

This has been happening in tandem with progress in the way gay people are portrayed in the media, and with gay rights in general, and therein lies the crux of my epiphany with *Tangerine*.

The ever-expanding LGBTQ acronym—for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and either “queer” or “questioning,” depending on the source—has become a rather big tent for sexually defined minorities who may or may not feel much affinity for one another. Lesbians and gay men have had a history of separatist tensions,

though much unity (and gay male humility) was gained during the AIDS crisis. People who identify as bisexual have been belittled and vilified by gay people for trying to keep one foot in the mainstream, especially in the early years of the modern liberation movement. Why can’t we all just get along? It’s never been an easy task to turn the spectrum between gay and bisexual and straight into discrete labels, Alfred Kinsey and his 0-to-6 scale notwithstanding. Even the act of labeling itself has come under attack in recent years, with “post-gay” consciousness a rejection of the need for it. The embrace of “queer” and “questioning” as umbrella labels is, in essence, a way of elevating the nonspecificity of it all.

But instead of blurring the lines, transgender advocates have recently been setting themselves apart. They point out that sexual orientation, no matter how it’s defined, is not a core issue for



Sin-Dee confronts Chester (James Ransone, center), her smooth-talking, unfaithful pimp, outside Donut Time, while her friend, Alexandra, waits for the drama to be over.



Mya Taylor as Alexandra (left) and Kitana Kiki Rodriguez as Sin-Dee Rella, friends and street survivors in *Tangerine*. Rodriguez was a friend of costar Taylor, who introduced her to director Sean Baker. "Mya and Kiki had this camaraderie together," Baker says. "There was something about it that I thought could make a perfect duo."

them at all. Transgender people may or may not be gay, and may or may not strongly identify with a particular orientation before or after transitioning. It is, simply, not the focus of their struggle. Identifying whether a transgender man or woman is gay or straight or bi (or queer) is at best tangential to his or her identity as trans. So why does LGBT need to be one big tent? The attempt to lump sexual minorities together is more a function of their shared rejection from the mainstream than anything else.

There has been an effort to clarify, in the world of public opinion, the differences between transgender people and the other sexual minorities. Drag queens, for example—men who make themselves up as women for theatrical

effect—are usually not transgender, and most consider themselves to be gay. On the cable TV reality contest show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, at least one drag queen has "come out" as transgender. For those viewers who conflate the two identities, that might have seemed confusing, but being transgender—which goes to the core of one's gender identity—is not just about wearing falsies. And then there are cross-dressers: people whose identity is tied up in their need to wear the clothes of the opposite sex, such as the filmmaker Ed Wood. These men or women are not necessarily transgender and not necessarily gay, and typically consider themselves to be anything but. Cross-dressing men (and their wives) have been coming to Provincetown for decades during the theme week known as Fantasia Fair. They enjoy the freedom that a gay mecca affords, but most of them do not identify as gay—or trans.

To help make things clearer, the nomenclature has necessarily changed, and may continue to change. *Transsexual* has been replaced by *transgender*, because *sex* can refer to gender, but it can refer to other things as well—it's imprecise. *Cisgender* identifies non-trans people in a non-normative way. It was a term invented out of necessity: the presumption before had been that trans people were so outside the norm that the norm itself had no need for an identifying label.

And for good or for bad, prejudicial presumptions about the "norm" tend to bind the LGBT community together. That is something well illustrated by the law recently passed in

North Carolina, which aims to legalize antigay discrimination at the same time it that it explicitly prohibits trans people (with outrageously bigoted justification) from choosing an appropriate public bathroom. The support for the trans community by gay rights advocates, particularly when it comes to North Carolina, has finally, after decades of sidelining, become a priority. That is the essence of the Trans Moment—or at least of *my* Trans Moment. As much as we can understand our differences within the LGBTQ big tent, we can empathize with and support our mutual struggles. And that is what brings me to Razmik, the Armenian cab driver in *Tangerine*.

SIN-DEE IS CONVINCED that Chester, an unimpressive local pimp (played by James Ransone), is her true love. At the onset of *Tangerine*, Sin-Dee has just been released from jail, after a stint of a few weeks. When Alexandra lets slip that Chester has been sleeping with one of his "hos"—a "fish," or cisgender woman—while Sin-Dee was locked away, the engine of the narrative instantly revs up. Sin-Dee, rabidly jealous and feeling betrayed, is now on an unstoppable mission: to find her competition for Chester's affections—a wretch named Dinah, who is played to scrawny perfection by Mickey O'Hagan—and take her to Chester and force a confrontation.

Alexandra is reluctant to help Sin-Dee. She hates the drama, and she knows that Sin-Dee, with whom she lives and whom she supports, is a hothead. That's what got her in jail in the first place. But Alexandra has another reason to hate this crusade: she feels guilty. She was the one who brought up Chester's infidelity, and there are other details, hurtful details, to which she has not yet owned up.

But delusions are like water—a precious resource in the semiarid Los Angeles landscape of *Tangerine*. Everyone in the movie, like characters in a Eugene O'Neill play, needs them to keep on going. Sin-Dee believes her relationship with Chester is romantic. Alexandra dreams of becoming a performer; she has arranged a singing gig at a local restaurant this Christmas Eve and spends the day trying to corral her friends and acquaintances to go see her. And then there's Razmik (Karren Karagulian), a cab driver in the neighborhood who is a recent immigrant from Armenia and has a wife, baby, dog, and mother-in-law waiting for him at home with a Christmas Eve feast. Razmik has a bit of a problem: he's wild about the transgender hookers of Santa Monica Boulevard. He's *hot* for them. And only them. At one point, he picks up an attractive young prostitute who is new to the neighborhood, agrees to a price, and then opens up her pants; when he discovers that she's cisgender and has no penis, he is shocked. He grabs his money back and kicks her out of the cab. Razmik is fixated on transgender women's penises. He wants to fellate them. And he has a crush on Sin-Dee.

Men like Razmik do exist. The multitude of porn videos that feature "chicks with dicks" will attest to that. Razmik's delusion is that he



can keep his passion compartmentalized and remain a family man. In the movie, Razmik is a stand-in of sorts for the cisgender audience, and particularly the gay cisgender audience. As much as he may be attracted to the exoticism of transgender hookers, he clings to the cloak of his mainstream home life. He takes that societal position for granted.

Being rejected and demonized by the very society that raised you is a point of extreme sensitivity to the transgender community, as it has been for most members of the LGBT community. But for all the strides toward acceptance that the gay community has made, the trans community has still, for the most part, been left out. The reason most transgender women, particularly women of color, have become sex workers is that it's the only means of survival left open to them.

Razmik generally treats the sex workers he patronizes with respect, but they view him pragmatically at best. Perhaps the closest *Tangerine* gets to a tender sex scene is the one in which Razmik, still reeling from his encounter with the cisgender prostitute, hires Alexandra and takes her to a car wash to give her a blow job. The camera views the act discreetly, from the backseat. The car wash, soapy yet dirty and strangely sensual, is a kind of time-out in a fast-moving narrative. Yet it's emotionally barren.

Another revealing transgender-cisgender counterpoint in *Tangerine* is between Sin-Dee and Dinah, the raggedy white ho who was screwing Chester during Sin-Dee's time in jail. Sin-Dee roughs up Dinah when she finds her, then drags her, like a dog on a leash, across the city—on the bus, even into the restaurant to see Alexandra perform. Dinah sullenly accepts her fate, but to her credit, she is self-aware. She chides Sin-Dee for the fairy tale she has constructed around her relationship with Chester.

The masterstroke of *Tangerine* is the way that it empowers its two leads, Sin-Dee and Alexandra, while viewing their romantic delusions with unblinking honesty. Sin-Dee propels the story forward, and Alexandra is its heart. When Alexandra sings "Toyland"—that "little girl and boy land"—for her restaurant performance in a rich soprano, she might be Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Tangerine also manages to avoid catering to cisgender anxieties about sex-reassignment surgery. Most of the problems with *The Danish Girl* are rooted in exactly that—the surgery is its raison d'être. In that film, much of the drama of each scene is based on ways of *looking* at Lili Elbe as a woman and her *appearance* as a woman, but not nearly enough of the story is about her actually *being* one. The dominant point of view is from the outside in. In *Tangerine* the opposite is true, and Razmik is a case in point: he's the only person who is concerned about the presence of a penis. The focus in the movie is on the *inner* needs of Sin-Dee and Alexandra.

And that's how *Tangerine* has changed me. What a contrast it is to the way transgender people are contextualized in the mainstream media! Think of all the Jerry Springer–Maury

Povich "is she or isn't she?" guessing games. Think of Lady Chablis on the witness stand in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* having to explain why she chose to keep her "toolbox." When Sin-Dee takes off her wig near the end of *Tangerine*, it's a moment of deep intimacy between her and Alexandra. It's not presented as an illusion-cracking shocker, but rather as a display of vulnerability—the wig had been damaged when Sin-Dee was bashed in a drive-by incident. What it substantiates is that at her core, Sin-Dee is a woman, and the wig is merely clothing or makeup—an enhancement.

Which is not to say that the outer trappings in *Tangerine* aren't killer. The hardscrabble, kitschy streets of Los Angeles never looked so good, imbued as they are with the movie's titular color of sunlight through the wide-angle lens of an iPhone. Sean Baker and his crew—whatever their gender identity or sexual orientation—did their job well. *Tangerine* is a complex and resonant story of trans pride. As a gay man, I could relate to that and respect that. Even if it isn't my story, its humanity and politics are universal, and I could embrace the Trans Moment as my own.

A MOST AMAZING THING happened this past March. Filmmaker Lilly Wachowski went public with her transitioning—she would no longer be known as Andy. This came six years after Lana Wachowski—Lilly's sister and filmmaking partner on such movies as *Bound*, *V for Vendetta*, *Cloud Atlas*, and the blockbuster *Matrix* trilogy—went public with her own transitioning (she had formerly been known as Larry). That puts the Wachowskis in a landmark position: they are transgender women and creative power players in an industry that is overwhelmingly run by cisgender men. Authorship might be the next step beyond the Trans Moment. Imagine that! It would be as if Alexandra's *Tangerine* dream had finally come true. ✕

HOWARD KARRIN studied semiotics at Brown, got his MFA at Columbia's film school, and worked as an editor at *Premiere Magazine* for thirteen years. He is currently the content editor at the arts-and-entertainment website PROVOKR.com, runs the Provincetown Film Art Series at the Waters Edge Cinema, writes a regular column of video reviews for the Provincetown Banner, and co-owns the Alden Gallery in Provincetown.

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PHOTO BY JOHN FRISBIE

Provincetown painter John Clayton tells students how to evaluate the light hitting the scene they are painting.

Cape Cod School of Art

By John Frisbie

WHEN MY WIFE AND I SIGNED UP FOR A CLASS at the Cape Cod School of Art this past year, we were excited to learn that we were tapping into a painting tradition going back to the original French Impressionists. Back in 1896, Charles Hawthorne became assistant instructor at the Shinnecock Summer School of Art on Long Island, where lessons about the Impressionists were first given in America. Three years later, armed with his Shinnecock experience, Hawthorne opened the Cape Cod School of Art in Provincetown, and the rest is history. Over the years, the school grew in stature and has been a place where budding artists could learn to appreciate the true character of light and color and make their work come alive.

So, how did my wife, Sharyn, and I, a couple living in Atlanta, Georgia, get interested in Provincetown? We came by it very naturally. Sharyn's mother, Ida Roderick, was born and raised in Provincetown, and two of Ida's brothers, Joe and Sonny Roderick, captained fishing boats in the Provincetown fleet for many years. Ida ultimately raised her family in Cleveland, Ohio, but always brought the family back to Provincetown in the summers to visit relatives. Over the years, Sharyn grew to view P-town as her summer home. I was raised in northern New Jersey, but, unlike our neighbors who spent their summer vacations on the Jersey Shore, my family always made

the six-hour trek to Eastham, Massachusetts. We loved the Cape and every summer we would take side trips into P-town to soak up the energy, enjoy its galleries, and delight in the gorgeous scenery. Provincetown has always been in our blood.

Our entry into the Cape art world began a few years ago when Sharyn and I were on vacation and drove past Village Pond in North Truro. We saw some artists with easels set up, painting the scenery. It turned out that the older couple facing out toward the ocean were Cedric and Joanette Egeli, and the young man on the other side of the road, facing Village Pond, was their son, Arthur. When

we stopped to observe their work and talk with them, we had no idea we were in the presence of such important members of the Provincetown art community. They were very friendly and told us about the Gallery on Commercial Street. They also told us about the Cape Cod School of Art and the oil painting classes it offered. We visited the gallery and immediately fell in love with the works we saw, struck by the play of light and color and how the scenes vibrated with life and energy.

And so, last September, we loaded up our car with painting supplies, easels, clothes, and our two dachshunds, and headed north. The following week, which we spent painting with our teacher, the artist John Clayton, and the five fellow students in our class, was one of the most enjoyable we've ever had. John showed us how to really look at color. White was never just white. It always picked up tones of yellow or blue or other colors, depending on what the sun was doing and what other colors were nearby reflecting off of it. We would meet at prearranged locations around town and paint specific scenes under John's watchful eye. What we learned in our class was such a revelation to us: light is filled with a whole range of color, and the light influencing a scene is dependent on a host of variables, including the time of day, the type of cloud cover, and the reflected hues of nearby structures.

An example of this incandescent light can be seen in *Morning on Shore Road*, a painting by John Clayton. This was painted in the morning, and there was a pinkish hue to the light, as can be seen in the wispy cloud covering. He was able to see how that pink hue affected the scene, particularly the sandy road in the foreground. The untrained eye doesn't see the pink, or the orange, or whatever the true light color is, because our eyes adjust and we homogenize the image to register what our brain is used to seeing.

Another of John's paintings, *West End Hidden Lane*, was done around midday, when the sun was shining brightly overhead, and the primary hue to the light was orange. You can see the color play out on the roof, on the grass, and throughout the painting. This piece was begun during class and, again, I was able to experience the scene through the artist's eyes and notice how the orange hue of the light affected the setting.

One of the things I liked most about John's teaching was that he painted with a palette knife and not a brush. He taught us to do the same, and the speed and simplicity of the knife made it far easier to get into a state of creative flow. With a brush, one is often tempted to blend and overwork certain sections, which can distract from the dynamic quality we like to see. After all, it's the proximity of unblended applications that is the essence of Impressionist painting.

As the days passed and we went from location to location in Provincetown, admiring and critiquing each other's work, we bonded as a group. In our off hours, we would see fellow students in town and shout hellos out of our car window as we made our way slowly down Commercial Street. We'd bump into one another



Morning on Shore Road, 2013, oil on canvas, 10 by 10 inches



West End Hidden Lane, 2013, oil on masonite board, 10.75 by 14 inches

in galleries and share information on great paintings we had seen elsewhere around town. Sharyn and I felt as if we were becoming part of Provincetown's creative community. Suddenly, we weren't just tourists anymore—we were the ones painting the beautiful scenery and tourists were watching us.

We look back on this as a remarkable week. We learned a lot, our painting improved dramatically, and, perhaps most importantly, we became a part of this artists' colony. We felt our paintings come to life, and come closer to the dynamic, vibrant feeling so characteristic of the

Cape School works we've come to love. I think if Charles Hawthorne were to ever look down from some cosmic painting studio in the sky, he'd be very happy to see the way his creation has turned out. I know we certainly are. 📌

JOHN FRISBIE completed his BA degree at Wesleyan University and earned an MBA at Boston University. He began his working career in the advertising world of New York City and later opened his own marketing consulting firm. He currently lives in Atlanta, where he does freelance writing and maintains his consulting practice for selected clients.



PHOTO BY PEGGY VANCE

John and Jill Kearney

JOHN KEARNEY

(1924–2014)

The following is an excerpt from remarks given by Jill Kearney on August 31, 2014, during a memorial for her father at the Beachcombers club in Provincetown:

HE COMBINED ELEMENTS of an eight-year-old boy, Buddha, Santa Claus, Alexander Calder, Studs Terkel, and Forrest Gump. He was part sea captain and hobo, free spirit and devoted family man, pacifist and tattooed navy vet. He didn't read, he wrote in all capital letters, and he was a Fulbright scholar. He was naive and unsophisticated and wise. He was tormented by the war, but in a deeper way he emanated calm and peacefulness. You couldn't really have a conversation with him, but all the while that he was obviously telling you an unsolicited joke or a war story, or not asking you anything about your life or forgetting your best friend's name, his demeanor was telling you that he was grateful to be in your presence, and that he would do anything for you, and that the world was good.

Being his daughter taught me many things, including the pleasures of this paradox. It also taught me to expect to be well loved by an uncommonly steadfast kind of person. When my life did not exactly match that expectation, I changed courses, and righted the ship. He was always somehow guiding me without ever giving me a word of advice. He was a very good father, not only to me, but to legions of children, and many of these former children are gathered in this room. He taught generations of East End kids how to fish and water-ski and sail. Some he taught to weld. I expect it would be hard to find a child who grew up east of the Green Monster in the last fifty years who did not learn something from my dad. And he taught my brother Dan's daughters, and mine as well.

His mother and stepfather were alcoholics; his own father spent forty years in a VA mental hospital. There was the Great Depression, moving often, being beaten by his classmates in New Mexico on his way to school, then pounded by his grandfather for ruining his clothes when he got home. Later, at parochial school, the nuns beat him with rulers; he ran away, was packed off to

military school. Pearl Harbor happened; he enlisted at seventeen. He was a navy bosun's mate and pilot of the amphibious landing crafts that brought the troops ashore in Saipan and Tinian. He piloted the living in, and ferried back the dead.

Certainly, he suffered from PTSD. His hearing was damaged by explosions, and he was deafer than we realized: hence the preemptive storytelling and the jokes, an effort to connect without having to listen for a reply. The war made him grateful that he had not died in his teens. *Joyful* is the word repeated most often to describe him in the e-mails and condolence letters we've received.

Having sketched in the Philippines, he brought the drawings to Cranbrook Academy of Art, which he attended on the GI Bill. After Cranbrook, he founded the Contemporary Art Workshop, an alternative art center for emerging artists in Chicago. Mom was looking to take a jewelry class. She rang the doorbell and a shirtless man in overalls poked his head out of the third-story window and climbed down the fire escape. He had obtained a building with a modest rent and only one small catch: you had to climb a ladder to get in. He asked Mom out on their first date—a matinee of *Peter Pan*—and he proposed to her during the intermission. She was engaged to someone else. She sorted things out and forty days later they tied the knot.

Dad had an inborn nurturing gene. He had a friend named David Nival, a pacifist who had been drafted in WWII, and suffered from crippling PTSD, and was too anxious even to go out for groceries. Dad visited him regularly, and brought him food and books, or a better toaster, or a nice pair of shoes he'd found. One of Dad's favorite activities was rummaging for friends. "David needs this toaster," he would say, coming through the front door with an armload of appliances or maybe yellow trucks for the grandchildren not yet born (there was a whole department at the studio for these), or tools some broke artist might need. His clothes were always secondhand. Except for the bad

comb-over that concealed (not especially well) his bald spot, he was devoid of vanity. The last few years at home he wore a pair of Salvation Army jeans that had a floral brocade hem. They were women's jeans but he didn't notice and wouldn't have minded if he had.

He loved to be needed, and to be of use. His greatest happiness came from rescuing boats from the sea. He had a quixotic Dudley Do-Right streak. He was grateful for the embracing eccentricities of Provincetown, where his strangeness was normal, and there was actually a club devoted to artists and sea captains, in which he was doubly qualified. He loved his workshop in Chicago and the extended community of artists and friends, which unfolded there over sixty years.

Physically tough, he was a member of the non-complaining generation. If a piece of molten metal fell down his shirt while he was welding, he would turn off his torch, lay it down, shake out his clothes, and get back to work. Every shirt he owned was ventilated with singe holes, but I don't remember one trip to the ER, or any mention of physical pain. He had strong bones from picking up bronzes and bumper horses, and in his very old age, when he fell down stairs or tripped over a curb, he seemed to bounce off the cement and carry on.

Mom and Dad were inseparable partners in everything. Cautious by nature, they took a lot of risks. They pulled Dan and me out of school in Chicago and enrolled us in a school in Rome for two separate years so Dad could cast his bronzes there. We lived in a sixth-floor walk-up heated by a coal stove: Dad had to drag the bags of coal up the steps, and, because I had a bum foot, sometimes he did this while carrying me.

I learned to appreciate living with inventive frugality. My parents made us feel that our fiscal condition was a badge of honor, an opportunity, and they managed to do things with us that my wealthier friends from school in Chicago never got to do. Not only did we live in Italy, but we also spent three months a year in Provincetown.

There is no way to adequately convey the importance of this town. It was Dad's psychic base. It was a perfect matching of his inner and outer lives. Our East End—from 1959 to the present—is an authentic community. We weren't just neighbors. We grew to love each other over generations of births and deaths. We drifted in and out of each other's living rooms and ate each other's food, and caught fish and cleaned them together and passed the extras up and down Commercial Street. We drove each other to hospitals and chemo appointments, and brought new boyfriends, husbands, and babies around for approval, as though we had twenty-five aunts. I have always ever since wanted to live with neighbors so close that I can almost hear them breathing when they sleep. Dad was the heart of this connectedness. On the East End, we are all forever fearing it will end. That the houses will become too fancy, and the neighbors will be looking for the Hamp-ton, and no one will want to clean the fish.

Dad had every imaginable kind of friend here, from Robert Motherwell to Colene Pindera, his beloved assistant at the studio. Colene was a lovable eccentric self-described bipolar bohemian. He taught her how to weld, and she camped in a trailer at his studio. He was a profound egalitarian and would have judged the queen of England by the same standards as the person who delivered his mail. He was the least and most religious person in the world: he never set foot in a church except when Mom dragged him in to look at the paintings, but he was religious in the sense of the Dalai Lama's sentence: "Kindness is the only religion."

For over thirty years, John Keith worked alongside Dad, hearing his unending loop of stories perhaps more than any other person. His relationship with Dad was like an alternate marriage. They could bicker all day at the studio and then go to the Beachcombers and drink and carry on all night. Often when they bickered John was right. John was meticulous and slow where Dad was in a hurry to make and make more.

I keep a quote from the artist Maira Kalman as a way of keeping my absent father close:

Everything is invented. Language. Childhood. Careers. Relationships. Religion. Philosophy. The future. They are not there for the plucking. They don't exist in some natural state. They must be invented by people. And that, of course, is a great thing. Don't mope in your room. Go invent something. That is the American message.

Dad invented one of the first alternative spaces in the country for emerging artists, a complex with twenty-five low-cost studios, a bronze foundry, and two galleries. Hundreds of young artists in Chicago had their first studio or show there, and set out in the world. Besides the bumper sculptures for which he is best known, Dad invented bronzes and kinetic sculptures: a manic motorized woman riding a bicycle and pounding on her motor with a pair of hammers till she managed to destroy her power source and shut herself off. After each performance he scrounged replacement motors at the dump. He invented *The Yes Men*, a pair of motorized teapot-headed men agreeing with insane vigor amongst themselves. He invented for the composer Jacob Druckman a composing machine in which musicians dropped coins, or ping-pong balls, or rocks. When they turned the crank it spun the drum and generated a kind of lunar music. Jacob used it in his Pulitzer Prize-winning composition, *Windows*. With a bulldozer, Dad flattened Beverly Mailer's Citroën, which had been a gift from Ernest Hemingway, fashioning it into a giant weather-vane head of Charles de Gaulle; we used to watch De Gaulle's beautiful monstrous schnoz spinning to guide our sailing adventures on the bay.

He invented military love medals for my mother, and presented them to her on numerous occasions, so she would know her value in

his life. When I got the part of the Donkey in the fourth-grade play, he invented a mask for me, which had a rubber-band jaw on a hinge so I could move it when I spoke. The rest of the fourth-graders wore masks made out of paper plates. I can't tell you how much I loved this thing, how privileged I felt. My classmates inhabited one dimension; I lived in three!

Dad didn't know how to read music, but he would lie down in front of the fireplace with Dan and me and do his best to invent the tunes to the great American songs we didn't know.

Dad and Heaton Vorse invented the first ever funeral for a car, memorialized in the last scene of Norman Mailer's book *Of a Fire on the Moon*. He believed he invented the idea of an insect antennae hat when he affixed a pair to the top of his Vespa helmet. You may have seen him driving around town looking like an elderly insect in a parade. After a boyfriend of mine was murdered, Dad invented an award for the person in Chicago who had contributed the most each year to preventing handgun violence. He decommissioned seized guns brought to him by the Chicago police department and welded them into the form of a giant plow. He made a cross for a Chicago church, welding a black Jesus onto a cross that had been burned on the lawn of a freedom rider by the KKK.

He made wooden stilts for all my friends, nailing hubcaps to the bottom so we could walk on the sand flats. He was always making jewelry for the women in his life. He held a contest to see who could invent the largest kite that could actually fly.

But Dad's greatest invention was himself. He invented a meaningful connected life out of nothing. He forged an enduring marriage with Mom and built a community and launched his children well into the world.

With Alzheimer's in his advanced age, he had already essentially left the room, and I was troubled by a nagging feeling that I had treated him shabbily; I ought to have said a real goodbye in all my previous visits, but now he did not know who I was. Still, he had a beautiful death, and we were all there holding his hand and singing, and we told him he could go. He waited generously until every last member of the family had entered the room before drawing his last breath.

For a long time afterward, I walked around feeling seasick, as if something was unfinished. Back in Pennsylvania, when I got a call from the cremation society, saying that Dad was about to be cremated, I stood for a moment thinking, where is the handbook for this moment? My brother got the same call. Dan, an apple not fallen very far from Dad's tree, got out some bottle rockets and lit them up in his backyard in Chicago and had his own private fireworks display. I went upstairs and sat down on my bedroom floor. I lit a candle. And then I put my head on the floor and whispered "Thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you" about a thousand times.

—Jill Kearney



VICTOR ALEXANDER

(1929–2015)

VICTOR ALEXANDER WAS A MAN at home deep in the woods of northern Maine, hunting for deer or moose; he was equally at home on the high seas in his boat, *Fish Hawk*, reeling in bluefin tuna. He would carve scrimshaw on the front steps of his house next door to the Provincetown Tennis Club, tossing balls that landed on his tomato patch back over the fence, followed by a chorus of cheers from a doubles group. His weathered face crinkled with smiles. Many remember his stint as a charismatic bartender at the A-House, paired with “Caribbean” Joe Giovino, who spent most of the winter sailing around the islands in the Caribbean.

In the seventies, Victor held court as the bartender at Rosy, the East End hot spot frequented by Norman Mailer, Robert Motherwell, John Kearney, Joel Meyerowitz, and others in the neighborhood. Victor’s raffish goatee was always trimmed; his lithe, tanned arms, flying into the air out of his tank top, were mesmerizing to watch—with a simultaneous splash from two bottles pouring into a clear glass, a tequila sunrise would burst forth with a flash of color. Under moonlight, people would gather on the wide deck fronting the bay, listening to the water lap against the wooden pilings.

Victor, in any of his many activities, from fishing to hunting to mushrooming, drew many friends into his special knowledge of the natural world, including artists Fritz Bultman and Myron Stout.

— CB



FRANCINE KOSLOW MILLER

(1951–2015)

FROM 1988 TO THIS YEAR, Francine Koslow Miller was Boston’s correspondent for *Artforum*, writing dozens of articles that brought the vitality of the Boston art scene to national attention. A graduate of Brandeis University, she published, just three years before her demise, a scathing critique of the university’s short-sighted attempt to close a budget gap by selling off masterpieces in the collection of its famed museum. The book, *Cashing in on Culture: Betraying the Trust at the Rose Art Museum* (Hol Art Books, 2012), offers a firsthand cautionary tale with international implications regarding trusts, deaccession, and the preservation of a uniquely created art collection.

Studying with Peter Selz, Miller earned a master’s degree from the University of California, Berkeley, writing a thesis on Hans Hofmann and the New York School. Her doctorate in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art history is from Boston University, where she wrote a dissertation on the graphic works of the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska.

I knew her as the president of the New England chapter of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA); in that role, annually gathering the dozen Massachusetts writers who were AICA members to debate and select the best exhibitions of the region, she fostered a sense of belonging, pride, and identity for artists working in New England.

In a studio conversation with Harvard’s Annette Lemieux, published in *Art New England*, Miller sat among works both finished and in process, remarking how the direct experience made her very appreciative of Lemieux’s “eccentric and enigmatic wit, conceptual feminism, meticulous craftsmanship, and reverence for art history.” Miller observed that it might be difficult for any internationally recognized artist to remain in Boston, with its quieter art scene, but, after all, as Lemieux said, “We are all sitting somewhere in a white cube making stuff.”

In person, Francine spoke the way she wrote: with rapid thought and penetrating insight. She had an infectious enthusiasm for the arts she discussed, and will be missed greatly by friends and colleagues.

— CB


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NANCY ELLEN CRAIG

(1927–2015)

Villanelle for Nancy Ellen Craig

By Christine Jones

The table is set,
Mozart's Clarinet Concerto plays
and we remember the company you kept.

In the oven, chickens rest
and the second movement strays,
but the table with floral dishes stays set.

Left are the sweatpants you sketched,
some charred books, brushes, wet paint;
nothing replaces the company you kept.

Not your copper bowl, ten-foot stretched
canvases, or an arbor of bitter grapes.
With the blue goblets on the table set,

we toast to art and love, but consider our regret.
For outspread hours we stayed
because we were in the company you kept.

Your life etched
with a palette knife, remains
a deep cut in the center of the table. It's set
still with the memory of the company you kept.

NANCY ELLEN CRAIG ENTERED on cue, like a diva, when the Cape Cod Museum of Art's exhibition curator, Michael Giaquinto, began telling us about this "incredible" artist one Sunday afternoon. Nancy had just been to the showing of Puccini's *Tosca*, *Met Live* at the Cape Cinema, and wanted to talk about her upcoming exhibit at the museum. Michael introduced us, and Nancy, true to her fashion, exuberantly invited us to lunch the following Sunday to visit her studio. We remember her enthusiasm and eagerness, as if she were a child excited to play with new friends.

That lunch was the first of many meals shared over the course of our friendship. She'd



PHOTO BY CHRISTINE M. JONES

often call to say she had a chicken in the oven, and ask us to bring over whatever food we had to add. She loved company, and hosted dinner parties frequently. Despite the many years she lived reclusively with her true love, Preston Carter, Nancy adored people and their stories. Her portraits captured those narratives.

Nancy discovered her gift as a fine artist at an early age. She drew her first horse after seeing a rodeo and realized she could capture its beauty in a sketch far better than she could with words. She was fascinated by how a horse embodied both the masculine and feminine mystiques. She told us once that her primary-school teachers allowed her to paint whenever the spirit moved her. After graduating from the Bronxville School and attending Bennington College, she worked briefly as a fashion illustrator, and then as a model for Lord & Taylor. In New York, she continued to develop her self-taught skills at the Art Students League, where she studied under Hans Hofmann, Edwin Dickinson, and Frederic Taubes. She credited Taubes with teaching her how to properly stretch and prime a

canvas with rabbit-skin glue and lead paint. At the Académie Julian in Paris, the woman who was "born to draw" refined her techniques by learning traditional methods of underpainting and glazing. By her midtwenties, Nancy had acquired international praise as a portraitist. In an *American Artist* article, Taubes remarked, "Some of her work approached the best American portrait painter, Thomas Eakins."

After two failed marriages, she found happiness in her love for Preston. She traveled the world with him, painting portraits for royalty, celebrities, and common people alike. After spending many summers in Truro, she and Preston settled there permanently in the early seventies. Residents could see them driving their old Mercedes, an oversized canvas tied to the roof, over to her barn studio, which was rented from William and Lucy L'Engle, or swimming at Ballston Beach in the late afternoon.

When painting, she would often go into a trance-like state, and sometimes huff, like a ready horse before flight. Her imagination soared in her mythological, biblical, sociopolitical, allegorical, and *Dream Series* paintings. She modeled her sketches after the Classical masters, such as Rubens and Da Vinci. It all came easily to her, just like her spontaneous recitation of poems by Dylan Thomas or W. H. Auden.

After her home burned down in 2006, only six months after she lost Preston, the Truro community reached out to their reclusive neighbor, and helped her to rebuild her home and her love for life. Her Christian Science faith, friends, and family—and, most rejoiced, her son, Craig—brought her strength and joy.

Nancy often liked to recite the words of the soprano Tosca, as she is being blackmailed by Scarpia in Puccini's opera *Tosca*, "vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore" ("live for art, live for love"). She lived by those words passionately to her end. Her ever-present youthful energy embraced all who knew her, and we are deeply enriched by her generosity and grace.

— Michael and Christine Jones



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RHODA ROSSMOORE

(1925 –2015)

I REMEMBER ONCE when I gave Rhoda a portrait I had painted of her, and she placed it next to another portrait that had been done of her. Putting aside any differences in quality, they were very different, as if of different people. While Rhoda was the same much-loved, well-respected, and admired friend to so many of us, to each of us she was also very different in helping us meet our different needs. Some needed her warm generosity—in fact, her pool was like the town beach club—for others, it was her wisdom, being made aware that “No” is a complete sentence, as is “Absolutely,” giving us the courage to go forward with whatever was in doubt; and for some, it was her delicious meals. While I certainly appreciated all of these things, for me her support and sense of humor were paramount. We laughed almost every day in the summer in Provincetown, during every Thanksgiving for twenty-some years, and all winter in Puerto Vallarta.

She supported many of the artists in town, which was separate from her more formal role at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. She donated her time in this way as well, and many examples of her generosity were mentioned in her obituary: she opened her house for fund-raising benefits, including benefits for the Provincetown Public Library, various political campaigns, the Fine Arts Work Center, and the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (her most extravagant fund-raiser was in 1981, with Howard Mitcham roasting a pig on the beach on a spit designed and made by Jack Kearney), as well as donating to Helping Our Women, the AIDS Support Group, and others. After being a board member of PAAM for several years during the 1980s and 1990s, she served as both secretary and president of its board of trustees. Rhoda, along with Ruth Hiebert, initiated PAAM’s Secret Garden Tour, which is still going strong.

Rhoda served brilliantly as the president of PAAM. Ironically, it was during one of her board



Rhoda Rossmore and Amy Germain at Gallery Ehva, 2013

PHOTO BY EWAN INGLEC

meetings that the idea for a publication that became *Provincetown Arts* was born. The first publishing party for the magazine was at the Rothschild home in Truro. Rhoda hosted the party for the first bound issue, which featured Norman Mailer on the cover. She also organized another *Provincetown Arts* party at her home in P-town. A photo of all the attendees on the flats wearing T-shirts saying “I was shot by Joel Meyerowitz” helped to mark the occasion. Ray Elman, who served on the board of PAAM when Rhoda was president, noted that she was the best president during the fifteen years or so that he was on the board.

I so valued her opinion of my painting that early on I’d drive over to her house with canvases still wet to get her advice—and I knew I wasn’t the only one doing so. All of her houses were like mini folk-art museums, but her house on Commercial Street was full of work by local artists. She had too many paintings to have them all hung at the same time, but she told me once that when artist friends came over they would look for their paintings to be displayed and she didn’t want to hurt any of us—so she found a way not to disappoint.

Once a week she held a poker game in P-town. The presence of jelly beans and one sure winner, Rhoda, stayed the same each week. On Monday nights, she’d play bridge with Marcia Brill and, again, more often than not they would win. She wasn’t just card smart,

she was smart smart, and an avid reader as well.

When she wasn’t gardening, you might have run into her shopping. With equal enthusiasm, she’d sift through items at the stores in town, flea markets, yard sales, or consignment shops and find the hidden treasures I wished I had found first.

Like most good cooks, Rhoda loved to eat. We sampled Provincetown’s wonderful restaurants a few times a week. She was a gourmet,

known by every restaurant owner, chef, and waiter in town, but for her, being a gourmand was even more fun.

Not many people have tennis shots named after them, but anyone playing at Bissell’s knew about the Rossmore Lob. It was very high, into the sun, and landed at the far edge of the court. Needless to say, it was typically a winner. When I played against her, I would give her my cockeyed drop shot and she’d race to the net to get it. What was memorable for me about this was that it never occurred to me that I was making a woman of eighty years run to the net. For almost all of her life, she had the energy of a young woman.

Well into her eighties she continued to manifest her zest for life. Rhoda and Will (her husband of thirty-six years), Marcia Brill, Nancy, and I met in Connecticut for a New Year’s Eve dinner and then spent a very long night at Foxwoods casino. While everyone was tired, Rhoda was the last to want to call the night over.

All was not easy. She had to deal with the tragic loss of two much beloved sons, Andrew and David. Still, she continued to be Rhoda, with the love and enormous support of her daughter Amy and son Neal.

Rhoda Rossmore was someone to take seriously, who did not take herself too seriously. She was a force hard to describe, who will be sorely missed.

— Ellen Langer

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HOWARD WEINER

(1943–2015)

HOWARD WEINER WAS TOUGH as a crocus. When most of us still reach for our woollens before entering the outdoors, when the truculent cat still finds herself sealed against human form for warmth, when, for God's sake, bears snore in their tappen caves, a crocus will pierce the snow, and be beautiful about it, lavishing us with yellow, or purple, or mauve. Very ta dah.

His childhood in Revere toughened him for life. A small, fey Jewish boy, he encountered indignity upon indignity from neighborhood thugs ignorant of Howard's noble blood, which he shared with at least one German composer. Or was it an Austrian conductor?

To spend time with Howard was to walk into an opera, full of highs and lows, stupefying turns of fate, all with his own self as the chorus pointing out the angelic and infernal. Mixed in would be light asides from his own days on the stage as a young tenor or, later, as a last-minute replacement for a conductor. I got to learn all of this sitting next to him while he performed his duties as host of classical programs on Provincetown radio station WOMR, including the Cape's only Metropolitan Opera on Saturdays.

Soon after his first cancer, he stopped riding his bike. He used to cycle to the radio station from his Provincetown inn, Howard's End, wearing his three-piece suit: WOMR baseball hat, WOMR sweatshirt, WOMR knapsack.

In treatment for his second cancer, he figured he would have to take a pass on the broadcast of *Eugene Onegin* from the Metropolitan Opera House so he trained me to take over. On the day, Howard did make it in, as always with his own conductor's score open before him. Something in the performance that afternoon went awry; Howard had me phone a man named John at Lincoln Center, during the live performance, to fix the glitch. It took a few congenial calls before we were righted. John said to me, "We have to keep Howard happy. If Howard's happy, we're all happy."



PHOTO BY CHARLIE FIELDS

Not long after, Howard gave me a recording of that very performance.

During his third cancer, we were in the midst of a fund drive. Answering the phone, I was overcome by the loving voices wishing Howard well. On the air, he had talked about his health; his fans called from the depth of their admiration and promised donations in kind. Once the broadcast resumed, he fairly skipped out of the studio. I told him of the rush of calls, almost incidentally telling him how much he'd brought in.

"It has its perks," he said. He beamed a Cheshire grin that welcomed funds with his mortality as lure.

In the final act, the hero finds love. Yi and Howard first met halfway between China and Provincetown, in California. Howard's binder would be open to Yi's picture during those Saturday afternoon broadcasts, and Mondays too. It would nevertheless seem an impossible quest

for these two men to be together. Then, all ex machina-like, the immigration gods smiled and gave them a life in Provincetown.

To be in their company felt otherworldly, the simple kindness between them ripe and generous. "He holds my hand when we're sleeping," Howard told me once as he and I looked out over Wellfleet Harbor. It was a rare moment of sheepishness for him.

Then came the fourth cancer, determined to crush Howard where the others had failed. His last word to me was "Sad," a single note in the maelstrom.

He went to his Valhalla with his love beside him in their own home. That he left on a new moon was a light touch on his part.

— Mary J. Martin Schaefer

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GRISWOLD (“GOOZ”) DRAZ

(1955–2015)

GRISWOLD (“GOOZ”) DRAZ died very suddenly of a heart attack on November 5. He was having a quiet morning picking up trash and lengths of locust branches strewn along our beautiful road. He was found with work gloves on, next to his new Jeep. He was gone. Unbelievably gone. He leaves me, his homestead, and our sons, Emmett, twenty, and Julian, seventeen, who have grown up in his image, height, wit, and warmth.

Gooz also leaves his latest creation, a photographic body of work. He was resurrecting this pursuit and had built a photo lab and raw exhibition space that he had yet to show off as he was just on the brink of being ready. He had refurbished his beloved Deardorff 8-by-10 camera and was endeavoring to marry digital innovation with traditional film. He secreted away here and afar to shoot, learn, study, fix, tweak, and dream, traveling to capture images. We had plans set to adventure out to see where the camera would take us. He was in a good place, full of passion and ideas. He was deeply convinced that the human species was doomed, taking all of nature down with it, but that was only part of the story. He was a complex creature, finding his way.

Gooz had a long history of making and supporting art. After studying photography at the

Museum School, he owned and ran the Zoe Gallery on Newbury Street in Boston. Many artists' careers were launched there—it was the height of the eighties, and epic parties have gone into the collective memories of those in attendance.

Around that time, he bought a run-down 1830s antique Cape on land in Wellfleet. He began to learn carpentry and redesigned the house with the expertise of artist Jack Hall. A decade later, Gooz and I were married on the front step. Over the next twenty years, we homeschooled and homesteaded while Gooz implemented sustainable living practices with composting, gardening, solar panels, and a small wind generator. It was a time filled with pond dips and reading out loud, grilled fish, humming bees, sticky hands, construction, moonlit walks, and music. It was and is our home. Gooz was committed to thinking, talking, and participating in environmentalism, social responsibility, and challenging the status quo. He was a lifetime nature lover and advocate. He loved Wellfleet for all that it is and all that it isn't. He loved our family and property as an oasis from the world. He steadfastly loved Truro, land of his boyhood summers with his brother, Christian, and his parents and childhood friends. He loved the beach, sun, and starry nights, and lived life with curiosity, heart, and an adventurous spirit. He was one of a kind. May his legacy and his light live on while we all love and miss him every day.

— Heather Draz (Emmett and Julian)



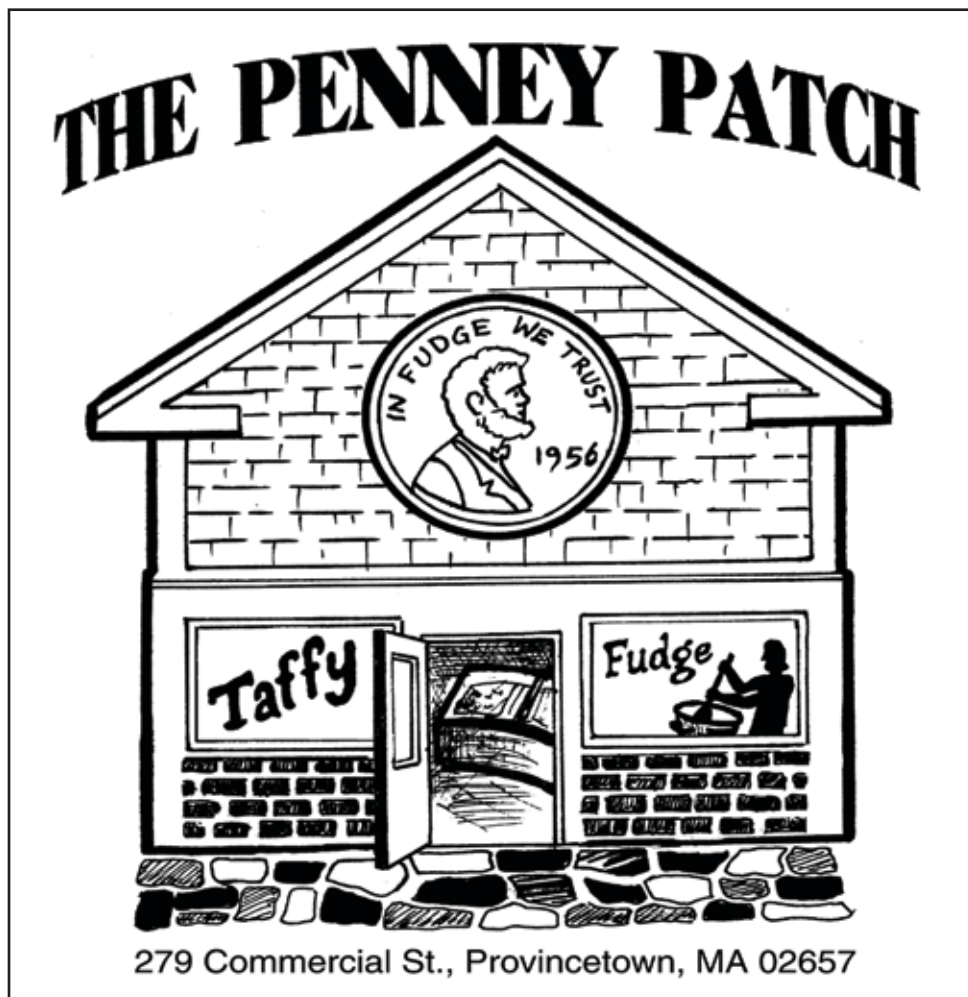
PHOTO BY HEATHER DRAZ

Gooz appeared in the doorway of my Fine Arts Work Center studio in the spring of 1986. There was his lion's mane, white T-shirt, and high-tops—not the picture of an intimidating art dealer from Newbury Street that I'd expected. He was thrilled to be opening Zoe Gallery and offered me a show then and there, making the Cape experience even more magical for me than it already was. When I dutifully asked for a written contract, Gooz waved any suspicion away with his hand, laughed, and penned our agreement on a paper towel. For many people, Gooz set a standard of unpretentious, enthusiastic honesty and integrity. He passionately believed that art and artists could change the world.

— Sharon Horvath

I loved running into Gooz at the pond with Heather and the boys, or at the Wellfleet PO, where, mail in hand, he'd pause, toss his head back, and somehow manage to smile and sigh at the same time. Then he would delve right in to whatever was on his mind—from family, town politics, the 9/11 conspiracy, to the future of the planet. He never seemed in a rush, just fully present in the moment. Seeing the powerful thread that runs through his artwork over the years, I wish that he'd talked more about himself, but that was not his nature.

— Tabitha Vevers



RAY NOLIN

(1959–2015)

Ray Nolin was at times difficult, often brilliant, always beautiful. All of us, those who own one of his paintings, or a sculpture, or a drawing, or those of us who just passed him on Commercial Street, will now ask ourselves how it came to be that Ray died living on the beach, living out of his van. It has a lot to do with Ray, with his difficult nature, but it has more to do with how Provincetown has changed since Ray first appeared here, sometime in the early 1980s, which is also when I first started coming.

Where I came from, my hometown, we had a couple of eccentric folks, guys who would wander the streets during the day, yet each had a place to sleep at night. Provincetown, when I got here, had even more—it was a town of eccentrics, of outcasts, of misfits, of the lost, the damned. And the thing was, here, they (we) all had some place to be, even if we had nowhere to go—Provincetown was the place you ended up when you didn't fit in anywhere else. Then, one-by-one, the most visible outcasts died off—Anthony, Popeye, Butch—but the town was still thick with those of us who could pass, most of the time, like Ray.

When I first met Ray he would paint landscapes with a palette knife—oils—mostly of the dunes. He'd hike in and set up and spend all day under the sun. He'd wear a broad-brimmed hat, had a short, blondish-reddish beard, and, yes, he looked like Van Gogh. When it got too dark he'd simply collapse his easel and hide his canvas in the tall grass, with plans to return the next day. I was living on a boat then, and for a while Ray stashed paints and canvases onboard, and I never knew when I'd find him set up, in the midst of a painting.

I know a guy who'd hike the dunes, searching the tall grass for a painting Ray had forgotten, or left unfinished, though he knew it was risky to bring it home, for if Ray found out, and he always found out, he'd simply break in and steal it back. Everyone knew the story of him breaking into Berta Walker's one night, dragging all his work into the parking lot, and building a bonfire with it. You never really owned anything Ray made—Ray was always working for God, not for you—this was part of his beauty and his difficulty.

He once recited a piece of scripture to me—*And Jesus said, sing me a new song*—as he was smashing one of the driftwood sculptures he'd given me to bits with a hammer, one that had hung on my wall for a year or so. Now that he's gone, all of us, those who've had to hide one of his paintings, those who stole one at some point, can now bring it out. And if we really understand what Ray was trying to do, all his life, we will burn it.



PHOTO BY MISCHA RICHTER

Here's a poem I wrote for Ray:

Emptying Town

—after Provincetown

Each fall this town empties, leaving me
drained, standing on the dock, waving *bye-bye*,
the white handkerchief
stuck in my throat. You know the way Jesus

rips open his shirt
to show us his heart, all flaming & thorny,
the way he points to it. I'm afraid
the way I miss you

will be this obvious. I have

a friend who everyone warns me
is dangerous, he hides
bloody images of Jesus around my house

for me to find when I come home—Jesus
behind the cupboard door, Jesus tucked

into the mirror. He wants to save me
but we disagree from what. My version of
hell

is someone ripping open his
shirt & saying,

look what I did for you.

—Nick Flynn

from *Some Ether: Poems*, Graywolf Press, 2000

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CHARLES W. HAWTHORNE (1872-1930), *Nude*, 1916, oil on board, 10 3/8 x 11"



OLIVER CHAFFEE (1881-1944), *Shells and Flowers*, 1928, oil on canvas, 24 x 20"



BLANCHE LAZZELL (1878-1956), *Untitled, (Sun & Water)*, 1936, gouache on board, 7 x 14 3/8"



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